LOGAN RODE THE VENGEANCE TRAIL FROM THE HELL OF ANDERSONVILLE PRISON TO THE BLOODY MASSACRE OF THE LITTLE BIG HORN...

BUGLES WEST

BY FRANK GRUBER

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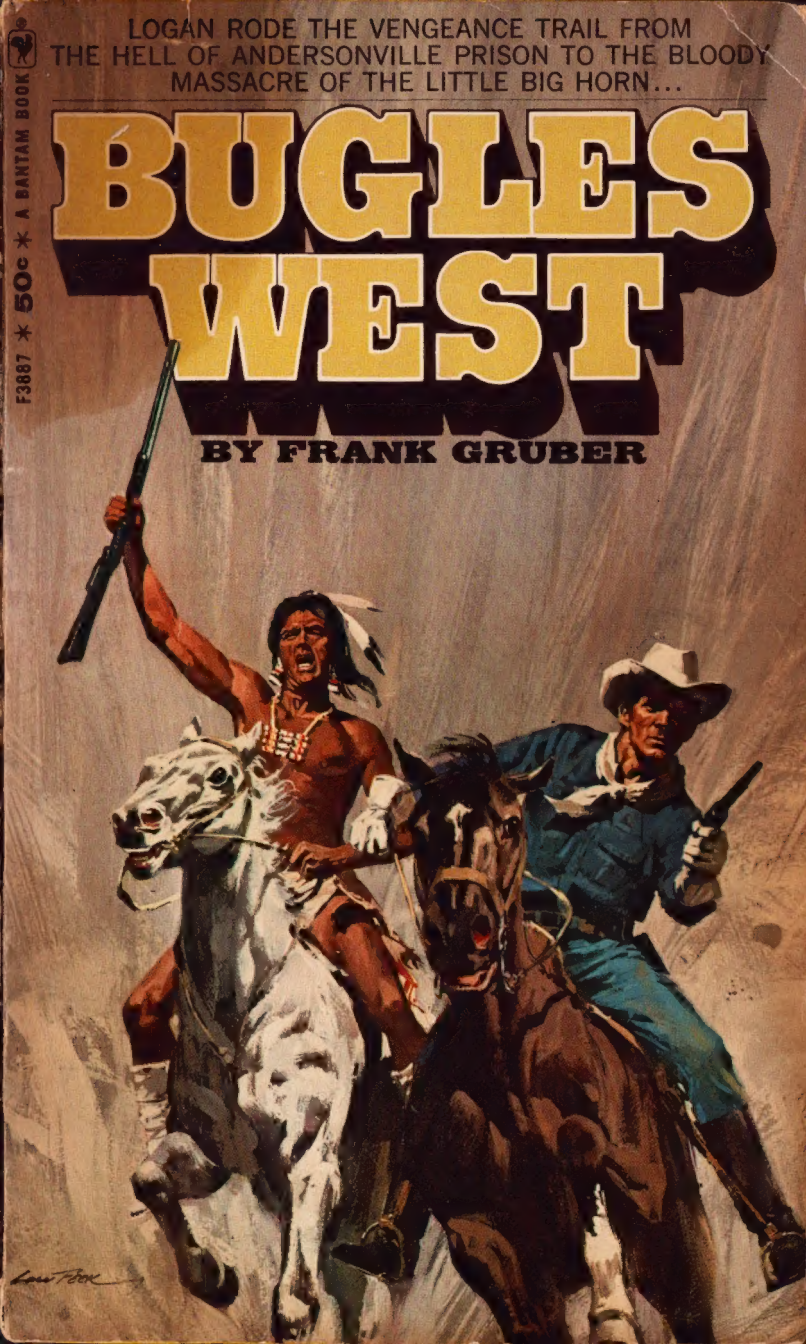

THE SEVENTH U. S. CAVALRY

It was Custer's personal regiment, the finest Indian-fighting outfit in the whole damned Army. They were veterans all—men who knew how to live off the country, to plunder, to strike silently in the night. Men who knew the meaning of an owl hoot, a buffalo track, a naked footprint, an arrow's whistle. Men who had been blooded by the Cheyennes and the Sioux. Men who had taken scalps, trophies and women from the hostiles.

It was among these men, the most hard-bitten soldiers in the world, that Tom Logan searched for his enemy, the comrade who had sold Logan's friends into ambush . . .

BUGLES WEST!

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FRANK GRUBER

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Bugles West

1

Logan sat in the scant shade of the lone cottonwood and watched the cloud of dust as it moved from the valley beyond toward the low hill a quarter of a mile away. He hoped that it was the stagecoach, and he hoped that he could convince the driver to turn and go back to the last stage station, for there was no stage station ahead.

Logan had seen the remains of it that morning, a heap of charred logs, a mutilated body near by.

A horseman appeared on the hill, then three more and behind them the stagecoach. Logan got to his feet. The horseman saw him and drew away from the stage, galloping toward Logan. They were United States Cavalrymen, led by a scowling corporal.

He pulled up his horse a dozen yards from Logan.

"What're you doing away out here?" he demanded.

"Waiting for the stage," Logan replied. "To tell you to go back." He pointed with his thumb over his shoulder to the north. "The Sioux are out."

The corporal swore roundly. "That's the way the Army does things. They got no right to let the stage travel through Injun country in the first place, but as long as they did and since they got to give it an escort, why didn't they give it a big enough one? What chance have four of us got against a war party?" He made an impatient gesture. "You see 'em?"

"They jumped me yesterday afternoon. About twenty of them. My horse gave out, but it was dark by that time and I got away. I cut the road this morning and followed it to the stage station. Only it isn't there any more."

The stagecoach pulled up behind the cavalrymen. The corporal turned in his saddle. "He says there's Injuns ahead!" he called.

The driver of the coach exclaimed, "Hostile?"

Logan moved forward. "They killed the stationmaster and burned the station."

The heads of two passengers appeared in the doorway of the coach. One was that of a woman, the other a middle-aged man.

"You goin' to turn back?" the man called to the corporal in charge of the soldiers.

The corporal scowled. "What else can we do? We can't fight a hundred Injuns."

"Twenty," corrected Logan.

"That's what you say," snapped the corporal.

The stagecoach driver now made his decision. "I got a run to make. I don't make it, the company fires me."

"What'd you rather lose?" the corporal demanded. "Your job or your life?"

The stage driver regarded the soldier coldly. "I figured you had a yellow streak up your back. Usually the way with a fellow who acts so tough."

"When we get back to Fort Meade," the corporal snarled, "I'll let you see how yellow I am." He turned his horse angrily. "Let's go!"

It was too late. The decision had already been made. A cloud of dust appeared in the north.

"Injuns!" cried one of the cavalrymen.

They milled around the stagecoach, prepared to take flight with it. The stage driver grabbed up his lines and cracked his whip. "Hang on!" he cried.

He swung his horses in a wide circle. Logan made a rush for the coach, tried to grab the leather boot, but missed by a foot.

He swore furiously and started after the coach, but knew even as he ran that he could not catch it. The soldiers, under the corporal, were also galloping away.

Then Logan skidded to a halt. Over the low hill, in the south, straight ahead of the plunging coach, appeared a dozen Indians. The stagecoach was between two war parties.

The coach came to a furious stop and the driver sprang to the ground, a shotgun in his hands. The soldiers swirled around the coach, awaiting the attack of the Indians coming from the south. They would hit two or three minutes before the other party, still some distance away. Against the first group the soldiers had a chance; against the second and larger party coming from the north, they stood no chance at all.

Logan pounded up behind the coach. The door swung open and the two passengers tumbled out, the middle-aged man and the woman—girl, rather, for Logan saw in a quick glance that she was scarcely twenty years of age.

"Down!" he cried.

The corporal rode his horse up to the group around the stage.

"We've got to run for it," he cried, almost hysterical. "We can't stand them off here."

"Where're you goin' to run to?" demanded one of the soldiers. "There ain't no place." He dropped from his mount,

fell to one knee and took aim at the approaching Indians.

The Indians were now in rifle range. They came on a wide front, whooping and yelling. Logan, armed only with a revolver, held his fire, but the soldier on the ground fired his carbine and an Indian dropped from the saddle.

The remaining soldiers now also dismounted and took up position beside their comrade. The corporal remained on his horse. Logan shot him a look, saw the panic on his face. Then he dropped to the ground and took a shot at the approaching Indians.

The Indians split as they came forward. One group went down the right side of the coach, the other down the left. Only two or three of them were armed with bows and arrows; the rest had rifles.

Their fire was wild but furious as they pounded down upon the whites by the stagecoach. Without slackening the speed of their horses, they went past the coach and re-formed three hundred yards beyond.

Logan rose to his knees. Beside him a soldier lay on his back, transfixed with an arrow. The stage driver was badly wounded, the male passenger dead. Th girl lay huddled beside the coach. Two of the horses hitched to the coach were down, the remaining animals thrashing wildly in their traces.

Logan sent a quick look around. A hundred yards to the east, galloping wildly, the corporal was in full flight.

"That Shuba," snarled one of the remaining soldiers. He whipped up his carbine, took quick aim and fired at the fleeing soldier. The bullet apparently missed, for the corporal went on.

"Save your ammunition," Logan cried. "You'll need it."

The soldier followed Logan's gaze and winced. The two parties of Indians had met and were spreading out with the obvious intention of making a full-scale attack.

"This is it," Logan said. He moved quickly to the wounded stage driver and dropped to one knee beside him. The driver tried to raise himself up, but couldn't.

"Turn me," he moaned. "Turn me so I can let them have one more blast."

Logan turned him over onto his stomach, saw that the shotgun was reloaded and, pulling back the hammers, put the weakened fingers of the driver on the triggers.

He started to turn back toward the two soldiers, then half whirled. The girl passenger he had thought dead was on her knees. She was pale, her eyes showed panic, but she gestured to him. "Give me a gun!"

Logan picked up the revolver of the dead passenger, twirled the cylinder and saw that there were three loads in

it. From the belt of the dead man he got additional bullets and slipped them into the cylinder.

"Hold your fire until they get close," he instructed. Then, after a brief pause, "Save the last bullet for yourself."

Her frightened face twitched. "They're coming!"

Logan had already heard the sudden whooping. He turned, dropped to the ground and thrust out his revolver. The soldiers flopped flat on the ground, but suddenly one of them buckled up to a kneeling position. He yelled, "Come on, you sons of——!"

Logan saw the bluecoat's body jerk as a bullet hit it. The Indians, shrieking, yelling and firing, thundered down upon the survivors around the stagecoach. As before, they split into two columns, one going down each side of the stage. Logan was aware that the stage driver's shotgun boomed in his ear, that someone near him was screaming insanely, but he never took his eyes off the charging Indians. Sprawled prone on the ground, his revolver thrust out, he fired swiftly, but surely, taking aim each time before pulling the trigger. A horse went down, another galloped past riderless. An Indian hurtled to the ground a dozen feet ahead of him, turned a complete somersault and came running directly at Logan. He fired and the Indian pitched to the ground. Even then he tried to get up, and Logan had to spend another precious bullet to dispatch him.

An arrow tore through Logan's shirt, taking along a strip of skin. A lance thudded into the ground a yard before his eyes. A bullet seared the calf of his right leg, but Logan remained flat on the ground, pulling back the hammer of his gun, aiming, firing.

He cocked and pulled the trigger twice, when his gun was already empty.

Then the last of the Indians was past him.

2

Logan scrambled to his knees, reached for fresh bullets. A quick look around brought a groan from his throat. The stage driver was dead, both soldiers were huddled on the ground in death. The girl—no, she was alive!

Blood streamed from a cut on her forehead, but she was crawling toward him, the only other survivor of the attack. "I killed him," she was whispering, "I killed him, I killed him . . ."

Then she uttered a wild scream. Her eyes, fixed on something beyond Logan, caused him to whirl. An Indian was crawling toward him. In his right hand was a hatchet. There was blood on his face, his chest, but he came on.

Logan slammed a cartridge into his revolver, thrust it out and fired. He heard the bullet whack into the savage, saw him start to draw back his arm to throw the hatchet. The Indian couldn't quite make it. Death overtook him and he collapsed in a huddle.

Logan turned back to the girl. She was kneeling, her body straight, a glazed look in her eyes. Shock had overtaken her. Logan moved toward her. Suddenly he slapped her face hard. Her eyes remained glazed.

Logan looked past her. Three or four hundred yards to the south, the consolidated Indian force was milling around. In a minute they would come again. And that would be all.

Logan drew a deep breath. Perhaps, if they thought the girl was dead . . .

He reached out and smashed the barrel of his Frontier Model along the side of her face. At the last instant he pulled back so as not to break her jaw, but even so, the blow was hard enough to knock her sidewards to the ground.

He picked up the dead passenger's revolver that fell from the girl's hand, got bullets and loaded the weapon. That gave him twelve rounds for the final assault. They would get him, he knew, but they would pay.

Then he became aware that something was wrong. The Indians continued to mill around. A shout now and then came down to Logan, but the Indians remained out of effective range.

Had they lost too many men in their two charges? Did they think the stagecoach not worth a third assault? Logan scanned the ground. There were eight, no, nine dead Indians scattered about the prairie. Still the augmented band of Indians numbered more than a score. Certainly enough for another attack. They must know that there couldn't be more than one or two survivors.

An Indian suddenly broke away from the rest, started galloping eastward. Another followed. Logan, watching closely, gave a start. The first Indian was wheeling his horse, galloping back.

Was that a cloud of dust in the east?

It was, and the Indians apparently knew what it meant. Two or three of them made a faint, halfhearted ride back toward the stage, but they went only a hundred yards or so, then turned and lit out after the main body of the Indians who were in flight now toward the ridge to the south.

Logan scrambled to his feet. He watched the last Indian disappear over the ridge, then turned and faced the east. The dust cloud was growing larger, coming closer. In two or three minutes he saw horses beneath the cloud, blue. . . .

Soldiers.

At Logan's feet, the girl stirred. A low moan came from her lips. He looked down.

Her eyes were open and they were no longer glazed. Logan dropped to his knees and slipped an arm under her head. He raised her to a sitting position. She winced and a hand went to her face.

"It's all right," Logan said. "They're gone!"

"Gone?"

Her eyes, a deep blue, Logan noted, looked away from him. A shudder ran through her body and she pushed on Logan's chest to draw away from him. He released her.

"Take it easy," he said. "The soldiers will be here in a few minutes." He pointed to her head. "You've got a bad cut on your forehead."

She touched the open cut with her finger tips, looked at the blood on the fingers.

"Are we . . . the only ones left?"

Logan nodded. "Another two minutes and we wouldn't be talking now."

She half turned, struggled to her feet. Logan got up quickly, helped her, then stood beside her as they looked eastward.

The cavalry were coming at a swift gallop, a full troop.

Leading the troop was an officer. Beside him rode Corporal Shuba, who only a short time ago had deserted his small command.

The troop swarmed about the survivors of the stagecoach battle. The young second lieutenant in command shot a quick glance around the scene of carnage. "You're all that's left?" he asked.

"No," replied Logan. "The corporal in charge of the escort is still alive. He ran out when the shooting started."

Corporal Shuba let out a roar. "I went for help!"

"Help, my eye!" snapped Logan. "You're as yellow as those stripes on your sleeve."

"Nobody can talk to me like that!" cried the corporal. He started to swing the muzzle of his carbine around, but stopped as Logan's revolver covered him.

"I'm talking to you like that," Logan went on. "I'm calling you a coward and a skunk."

"Wait a minute," interrupted the lieutenant. "Let's hold up

the name-calling a minute." He turned to the corporal. "How did you know there'd be help within calling distance?"

"Why, why—uh—the stage station, back there—the agent told me that a cavalry troop was around somewhere."

"I don't see how he could know," replied the lieutenant, "since we never went anywhere near his place."

"He knew, all right," declared Shuba. He brightened suddenly. "How would I have known just where to find you?"

"You didn't," said Logan quietly. "You just happened to stumble on them."

"That's a lie! I told you——"

The lieutenant cut him off with an angry gesture. "Your story stinks, Corporal. Even if you had known we were in the neighborhood, you had no right to leave your command. You should have sent one of your men."

"They wouldn't go. They—they were afraid. . . ."

The lieutenant turned his back on the corporal in disgust. He nodded to the girl beside Logan. "I'm sorry, ma'am, about what happened." He dismounted and stepped up to the girl. "Let me see that cut on your head."

"It's all right."

"No, it isn't." He turned. "Sergeant Springer, first aid."

A sergeant dismounted and came forward. For a few minutes he and the lieutenant were busy bandaging the girl's wound. Then they turned to Logan and saw to his minor wounds.

Some of the troopers had caught a couple of horses and now brought them forward for the girl and Logan to mount.

"I can give you an escort to Fort Meade," the lieutenant said. "There you can get a stage to wherever you're going."

"Fort Abraham Lincoln," the girl said.

The lieutenant looked at her in surprise. "The Seventh?"

The girl nodded. "I was on my way to visit my sister. She—she's married to Lieutenant Dressen——"

"Dressen?" suddenly exclaimed Logan.

"You know him?"

"I once knew a man named Dressen," Logan said slowly. Then he shook his head to brush away the haze of memory. "But it couldn't have been the same Dressen."

3

Alice Wilder stepped off the train into the waiting arms of her sister, Harriet.

"Oh, my *dear!*" cried Harriet. "I'm *so* glad to see you. Here—let me look at you." She pushed her sister away, then exclaimed, "What happened to your head?"

"That is the reason I'm three days late," replied Alice. "The stagecoach was attacked by Indians." She shuddered. "It was horrible, Harriet. I'm just now able to think clearly about it."

"You were wounded, Alice!"

"Not by the Indians. The man who saved my life. He—he knocked me unconscious, so the Indians would think I was dead, and—and not . . ." She winced. "I'll give you the whole story later. Where's Jim?"

"He's on duty. He wanted to come with me, but he couldn't. That's the way it is in the Army, your time's not your own. But come—we'll talk as we ride out to the Fort."

Alice caught up the carpetbag and box she had set down and followed her sister to a carriage at the edge of the platform. They piled into the buggy, and Harriet started the horses down the main street of Bismarck.

"A horrible-looking town, isn't it? Well, such as it is, it's the only one for a good many miles in any direction, and for that matter it's the last town, going west. From here on it's Sioux country."

Alice shivered. "I never want to see a Sioux again as long as I live."

"There's one now," exclaimed Harriet, pointing to a blanketed Indian standing in front of a store. "But don't worry, these are tame Sioux. We have quite a few around here. Although Jim claims there's no such thing as a tame Indian. He says they're just pretending to be tame, waiting. . . ."

"Waiting for what?"

"For the big war. Oh, it's coming, Jim says. The Sioux claim we've broken our treaty with them by opening up the Black Hills. Maybe we have, I don't know anything about those things. But there's a war coming; everyone at the Fort thinks so. The Indians are buying up rifles and the Army—well, the general hates Indians."

"You're referring to General Custer?"

"Yes, of course. He's our commandant. I know he's only a lieutenant colonel, but everyone calls him general. You'll meet him—he's fascinating. The boy general, he was, during the war . . . one of the greatest soldiers this country's ever had. And think, he's only thirty-five or so, right now. Just about Jim's age."

"Ah, Jim. How is that husband of yours?"

Alice was looking at her sister's face as she asked the question, and she thought for an instant that a cloud flitted over Harriet's features. But Harriet's tone, when she replied, had all its warmth and enthusiasm. "He's wonderful, darling. Our marriage has been good."

"I'm glad, Harriet. For your sake. He's a handsome man, that husband of yours. *Too* handsome."

"Why too handsome?"

Alice laughed merrily. "I'd be afraid of such a handsome man. For fear the other women would throw themselves at him."

"Jim's not like that, Alice. Thank the Lord! You've never had a chance to really get acquainted with him. Well, you will now. You're going to stay with us a month."

"A week, Harriet."

"A month. I won't let you leave." A trace of anxiety appeared in Harriet's voice that Alice was quick to catch.

"All right," Alice said. "I'll stay as long as you want me. Until my welcome's worn out."

"Then you'll stay longer than a month. We've got four years to catch up."

Alice Wilder met her brother-in-law an hour later, in the little apartment on officer's row that was like that of every other married first lieutenant in the regiment. It consisted of a tiny kitchen, a bedroom and a living room in which you could hardly turn about.

Lieutenant Dressen came in for dinner. He was wearing his saber and revolver, for he was still on duty. His eyes admired Alice Wilder as he kissed her warmly.

"Maybe I married the wrong sister," he teased.

Alice, at the moment, was glad that her sister had married Dressen before she had really got to know him.

He was a handsome man, six feet tall, lean, tanned and had a gleam in his eye that could have caused the heart of a young girl to flutter most wildly. A professional soldier is always an intriguing figure to a girl of twenty.

Alice said, "I'll settle for a handsome captain."

"Who'd outrank me?" exclaimed Dressen.

"Dinner's on the table," Harriet Dressen said suddenly.

They seated themselves at the little table where Harriet had placed a light lunch. After his hearty greeting of Alice, Lieutenant Dressen was oddly quiet as he passed food and helped himself. Alice shot a covert glance at her sister, but Harriet's eyes were on her plate.

Then Dressen said, "To get ahead in this regiment your name has to be Custer."

Harriet said quickly, "Jim's referring to Tom Custer, who is five years younger than he and already a captain."

"I've heard of him," said Alice. "For that matter, who *hasn't* heard of the Custers? Didn't Captain Custer distinguish himself during the war?"

"His brother cited for him capturing a battle flag or some such thing," said Lieutenant Dressen. "He was about nineteen or twenty at the time—a captain on the general's staff." His lips curled contemptuously. "They were pretty free and easy, the West Point clique, with their promotions. Custer was twenty-three, a lieutenant and they boosted him all the way to brigadier." He turned to Alice Wilder. "Don't get me wrong, Alice, I like the Army. It's been my entire life, but I'd be a major now if I'd been a West Pointer."

"I don't understand," Alice said. "You were a captain at the end of the war and now you're a first lieutenant."

"Custer was a major general at the end of the war. A brevet major general. Actually, he was only a captain in the Regular Army, and that's what he would have stayed if it hadn't been for the West Point clique. They made him a lieutenant colonel over the heads of dozens of older officers. I was a captain of volunteers, and I was discharged from the Army altogether. I had to take an examination to get even a second lieutenant's commission. I had no pull. Most of my Army work was undercover."

"Undercover?"

Dressen made a slight gesture. "Secret service. I was a scout part of the time, and part of the time I guess you might say I was a spy for the Union."

"But wasn't that dangerous?" exclaimed Alice.

"Let's say it wasn't as easy as leading a thousand well-armed Union cavalrymen against fifty or a hundred half-starved, poorly mounted Confederates. But it was the Union cavalry that got all the glory and the promotions."

He speared a mouthful of food with his fork, carried it to his mouth, then returned it petulantly to his plate, clattering the fork on the china.

Harriet, who was well aware of her husband's moods, tried to change the subject of conversation.

"Alice was practically killed by the Sioux on her way here," she said. "Tell him about it."

"Where did this happen?" Dressen asked.

"Oh, several hundred miles from here. The northbound stage to the railroad was attacked by Indians. There was a cavalry escort and—" She bit her lip, then went on. "The corporal in charge fled at the first sign of attack."

"A corporal of cavalry?" cried Dressen sharply. "What was his name?"

"Shuba, I believe. He wasn't from the Seventh, though."

"Of course not," Dressen said automatically. "Go on—how did you get out of it?"

"There was a man we met, just before the attack. Some sort of plainsman, I guess you'd call him. He held off the Indians until we were rescued by a detachment of soldiers."

"One man held them off?"

"During the last attack, yes. I mean, there were two or three more people, including a couple of soldiers, but they were killed. This man and I—we were the sole survivors. Not counting this Corporal Shuba, who ran away."

"Isn't it wonderful?" exclaimed Harriet. "This man, whom she'd never even met, saved her life. And he could have run away himself like that—that cowardly corporal."

"Some of these plainsmen are pretty tough," Lieutenant Dressen said easily. "What happened to this fellow afterwards?"

"Nothing. When the soldiers came, he stayed with us for a while, then he went about his business, I guess."

"Too bad you didn't get his name. I'd send him a present or something. Or write him a note of thanks, at least, although I don't suppose he's the sort who could even read."

"On the contrary, he spoke very well, and I had the feeling that he was a man of some education." She frowned. "As a matter of fact, I did ask him for his address, but he said he had none—he was traveling all the time."

"That's the way with those fellows," Dressen said. "What was his name? Maybe I'll run across him some time."

"His name was Logan—Tom Logan."

Dressen sprang so quickly to his feet his chair crashed to the floor.

"Logan!" he cried, his face turning ashen. "*Tom* Logan?"

"Yes. You—you know him?"

Dressen swallowed with difficulty. He made a tremendous effort to compose himself. "Wh-what makes you ask that?"

"The way he acted himself, when I mentioned your name. He said he once knew someone named Dressen. Years ago. . . ."

"Yes," said Dressen, fighting to keep his voice from trembling. "I once knew a man named Tom Logan. He—he served under me during the war. A sergeant . . ."

4

Now and then, in the black of a night, a desperate man used his last strength to scale the ten-foot stockade that surrounded Andersonville Prison. And then he died. Sometimes he died on the top of the stockade, sometimes he fell to the ground on the outside. The result was the same—he was dead. Once in a while a man even got over the stockade alive, traversed the open area beyond and got into the woods. Then the hounds would follow him and his death was the worse for having tasted of the moments of freedom.

Escape from Andersonville was impossible, yet men were compelled to try. When a man has lived in a hole in the ground, when he has been soaked for days and nights on end, when he has been starved to emaciation, when death bcomes more desirable than abject life, then a man must try to escape.

Logan had been in Andersonville fourteen months. He had seen comrade after comrade try the desperate venture. A few had survived, those who had been apprehended before they reached the top of the stockade. They had been flogged, and their daily handful of parched corn had been taken from them, so that others had to feed them from their meager rations. Starved, they had been worked to exhaustion so that some deliberately rushed the guards to seek a quick death. Logan had not known any who cleared the walls to survive. Listening, he had heard the rattle of gunfire, the baying of the hounds, sometimes the screams of the dying men. And then, posted on the bulletin board the name and the legend, "Killed Trying to Escape."

And now Logan was himself making the great attempt. Seven months of clandestine toil had gone into the digging of the tunnel. Twenty men, working in relays, had dug six feet down, from the hole that Logan and Dressen huddled in every night, then straight south, three hundred and sixty feet. Sixty feet to the stockade wall, three hundred feet beyond, one hundred and eighty feet underneath the cleared

fringe of earth around the stockade, then another hundred and twenty feet into the thicket. Then six feet straight up.

Seven months of tunneling. A man went into the hole, dug a ten-pound sack of earth, then crawled back to the mouth of the tunnel, came out and somehow distributed the fresh earth about the compound so it would not be seen by the ever-vigilant Confederate guards who roamed the area during the day.

Seven months of hope and tonight they would make it, all those who had dug and still had strength to make the effort. Food had been hoarded a few grains of parched corn now and then, a scrap of bacon, a mouthful of the moldy pemmican that was issued so rarely.

The tenth of November, 1864. Sheridan was devastating the Shenandoah, Grant was squeezing Richmond, Sherman was marching to the sea in Georgia, and everywhere the Confederacy was making a last desperate effort to hang on, hoping somehow to snatch victory from the impending debacle.

The gray soldiers in the field were short of ammunition, their uniforms were ragged and patched so many times there were patches on the patches; the soldiers shivered without blankets over fitful fires when they could make fires. Their bellies were empty, their faces were pinched. There were fifteen- and sixteen-year-old veterans in the line, and only the disabled, the unfit, the dregs, could be spared for duty that was not directly concerned with the final, savage trial by arms.

The sentries who guarded Andersonville Prison in November, 1864, had once been men; now they were cripples, either physically or mentally. If they were sound of limb, they were the riffraff who had been sent back from the fighting regiments as undesirable for even the final stand.

The desperate ones came to the cave of Logan and Dressen that night of November tenth. Singly and in pairs they scurried across the rough ground and scutttled into the tunnel that would lead them to—freedom.

They were counted, and Logan cautioned each man before he disappeared. "We've got to stick together at the other end until every man is out. We can't take a chance on a single man making a noise, blundering into a sentry, rousing a hound. Not until every man is ready, waiting, can the first one leave the tunnel. And we've got to stay together then, at least through the night, until we are far enough away."

"I make it nineteen," said Dressen, as the last man crawled into the hole. "That's one more than worked on the tunnel with us."

"Two," corrected Logan. "Tompkins dug, but decided not to go."

"He's in pretty bad shape. He couldn't travel a half mile."

Logan drew a deep breath. "A couple more or less won't make any difference." In the darkness he reached out and found Dressen's shoulder. "All right, Jim, it's your turn."

"Uh-uh," said Dressen. "I'll bring up the rear."

"That's my job," Logan countered.

"Going to use your rank on me?"

A sudden wheezing outside the little cave froze both men. "Yes?" Logan asked softly.

"It's me, Danny Fenton," whispered a voice.

"Go back to your hole," Dressen snapped.

"I—I can't," said the voice of Danny Fenton, who was sixteen years of age. "I've got to go with you. I've *got* to."

He crawled into the cave, trembling and wheezing. In the darkness Logan caught a pitifully thin arm and was shocked. "I'm sorry, Danny," he said kindly, "it's going to be too rough."

"I don't care," Danny Fenton moaned. "I can't stand it here any more. I—I'm sick . . ."

"All the more reason you've got to stay," exclaimed Dressen.

"I can't. I'll die for sure." Fenton appealed to Logan. "Please, Lieutenant, let me go along with you. I'll keep up. I promise."

"I know you'll *try,*" Logan said. "You're a good soldier, Danny. But sometimes a man—a man just can't do things, no matter how much he tries. There's nineteen men, besides Sergeant Dressen and myself. We can't jeopardize their chances——"

"I've *got* to go," Danny Fenton said in panic. "I had a letter from my mother last week. She's sick—she can't work. She needs me. I'll die here, I know I will. I've got to take the chance for—for her!"

"Oh, hell!" said Dressen in disgust.

"All right, Danny," Logan said. "Here—get going."

He gave the puny soldier a shove, and the lad crawled into the hole. Logan tapped Dressen, and the sergeant no longer protested. He climbed into the hole. Logan waited a moment, then went in after him.

It was pitch-dark in the tunnel, but it didn't matter. There was only one way to go. Logan crawled in the wake of his twenty-one comrades. It was damp in the long hole and here and there soft earth had fallen from the roof, but he squirmed over it as had the others before him and at last he came

to a complete halt, his hands touching the feet of Sergeant Dressen, the man ahead of him.

"How does it look?" he called softly ahead.

"All right," a voice replied from the head of the line.

"Break the roof!"

Ahead, a man grunted and wheezed, then the voice came back. "I'm through."

"Climb out and wait."

Slowly the line began to move as man after man climbed out of the tunnel. Finally Dressen moved. Apparently he had to help young Danny Fenton out of the hole for Logan heard him muttering angrily under his breath.

Then Logan stood up at the terminal of the tunnel. Hands reached for his, lifted him out.

There was a rift in the clouds. The moon did not shine through, but enough light came so that the escaping prisoners could make out the trees that surrounded them.

Logan looked toward the stockade. A half-dozen fires could be seen faintly through the fringe of trees that were between the prisoners and the stockade. There were sentries by those fires, dogs.

He turned back toward the woods. "Straight ahead," he said softly. "Touch the man in front of you so we won't have any stumbling. Move slow—and quiet!"

The file began to move. Logan reached for Jim Dressen, could not find him. "Jim?" he asked quietly.

A branch snapped ahead. A tiny blaze flickered in the woods, the light of a match. Then a resin torch burst into flame and was thrown into the midst of the file of prisoners.

"Fire!" thundered a voice.

Streaks of flame darted from the thicket on the right side of the prisoners. Thirty streaks, forty, fifty. Rifles thundered and roared. Death struck down the prisoners.

Screams and cries of anguish rolled up, punctuating the deafening gunfire. Men rushed in all directions. The guns kept pounding them.

A bullet ploughed through Logan's thigh and he was carried back into the stockade, into the orderly room, where the few scarecrows who were the survivors of the attempted escape were lined up. Almost all of them were wounded, some seriously, but they were yanked and hauled into position before the commandant of the camp.

Scarcely able to stand, Logan looked down the line. Six feet away stood Jim Dressen and for the first time, Logan saw him in a new light. He was used to seeing Dressen every

day. He slept in the same hole with him at night. They were friends; they had enlisted together as privates back in Michigan that day in April, 1861. They had been taken prisoners together. They had been as close as any two men could be. They had shared each other's canteens, food. Yet Logan knew that he had been slowly starving in prison and Dressen, on the same meager rations, was robust and strong. He had lost no weight.

And now Logan remembered that Dressen had not been beside him after they had climbed out of the mouth of the tunnel.

The commandant said, "Half rations for ten days, twenty lashes for each man."

"And the man who betrayed us?" Logan burst out. "What does *he* get?"

The commandant glowered. "Who says anyone turned you in?"

"You knew where the tunnel ended. You knew when it was finished, even though we'd been working on it for seven months."

"No one's ever escaped from Andersonville," the prison commandant sneered. "I'm going to teach you men such a lesson that no man will ever *try* another escape."

"Nine men died out there," Logan said. "Because of a traitor. . . ."

His eyes met those of Sergeant James Dressen.

"No, Logan," cried Dressen hoarsely. "It wasn't me. . . ."

But Dressen did not return to the prison compound, and none of the prisoners saw him again at Andersonville.

5

Sergeant Cotter had enlisted in the Army when a cavalryman was still called a dragoon. He had learned his soldiering in a rugged school, and he liked to pass it on in the same manner in which he had learned it.

He led the three recruits into the squad room and lined them up. Each of the three men was loaded down with newly issued uniforms, saber, carbine, revolver, bedding and the miscellaneous gear that was issued to recruits.

Sergeant Cotter, with an audience of old-timers to hear and admire his wit, glanced at a slip of paper. "Ah, yes, *Mister* Ezralow, you'll take this nice bunk over here by the door. It used to belong to a good man who was scalped by

the bloody Sioux a couple of weeks ago, so he won't be needing his bunk no more, rest his soul. Trooper Dolan, and I use the word loosely when I call you trooper, here's a nice little bunk for you. Trooper Fetterhoff, who used to have it, is spending a bit of time in the guardhouse, so he won't be needing it. Trooper Logan, and a fine broth of a man you are, here's the nicest bunk of all that I been saving for you. It was formerly used by Trooper Hooley, who, damn his hide, went over the hill before I could make a decent soldier of him."

Logan dumped his gear on the designated bunk and began to straighten it out. He worked for a moment or two before he became aware of the silence in the squad room. Then he looked over his shoulder to discover Sergeant Cotter standing over him.

"Trooper Logan," the sergeant said icily, "you turned your back on me while I was talking."

"I thought you were through," Logan said.

"In the army, Trooper, you will be told when a sergeant is through talking to you. You will also be told when to get up in the morning, when to eat, when to shovel manure, when to drill, when to eat, when to drill some more, when to fight, when to sleep. You will be told everything that you will do from early morning to late at night, each and every day for five years, plus whatever guardhouse time you will be making up and in your case, I can already see, that this will be a substantial number of days. Do you understand?"

"I think so."

"You *think* so. I just got through telling you, did I not, that you will not have to do *any* thinking whatsoever in this man's army. It will be done for you. You will be told what to do, when to do it, why—no, you will not be told why. Just what and when. If you have a thinker in that skull of yours, which I doubt, you will not use it. Not as long as you are a private. When you become a corporal, which you might become along toward the end of your five years, although I doubt it, you will be allowed to do a bit of thinking. Just a small amount. And if perchance you re-enlist and you become a sergeant along about your ninth or tenth year, then, yes, *then* you will be allowed to do a little more thinking. Do I make myself clear, Trooper?"

A rugged-looking, heavy-set soldier wearing the chevrons of a first sergeant came into the squad room. He carried several folded sheets of paper in his fist.

"Through, Sergeant?" he asked Sergeant Cotter.

Sergeant Cotter, somewhat abashed, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Why, yes, Top. I was just assigning

the recruits to their bunks and maybe giving them a bit of the rudiments of soldiering."

"That's fine, Sergeant. And did you also tell them how you won the Battle of Gettysburg?"

Sergeant Cotter reddened. "You know I wasn't at Gettysburg."

"Oh, was it Vicksburg, then?"

"I wasn't there, either." There was a strained pause. "They kept me in Oregon during the whole bloody war! *You* know that, Top. You saw it on my service record."

"Service record, ah, yes." The first sergeant glanced at the papers in his hand. "Logan!"

Logan came to attention. "Yes, Sergeant."

"I was just glancing at *your* service record. You enlisted in the fifth Michigan cavalry in April, 1861, as a private. You were promoted to corporal in July, sergeant in December." He shot a quick glance at the discomfited Sergeant Cotter. "You received a commission as a second lieutenant directly after the second battle of Bull Run and you were promoted to first lieutenant just *before* Antietam." The first sergeant paused. "You were wounded and captured at Antietam and remained a prisoner until April, 1865. At Andersonville."

The first sergeant lowered the service record and regarded Logan thoughtfully. "I put in four months at Libby Prison myself. They tell me it was a rest home compared to Andersonville."

Logan shrugged. "That's ten years ago."

"But you won't forget it in another ten years."

Logan knew that he would not forget it in another thirty years. Nor would he ever forget Sergeant James Dressen, who had been with him at Andersonville, who was now Lieutenant James Dressen of the Seventh U. S. Cavalry.

The first sergeant nodded thoughtfully. "In view of your past service, Logan, we'll skip the recruit training. You'll go right into—mm—the second squad. Corporal Shuba . . ."

"Yes, Sergeant!" Corporal Shuba got up from a cot across the room and came over. Logan stared at him. The corporal returned his look coolly.

"Looks like a good man," Shuba said laconically to the first sergeant.

"Carry on." The first sergeant nodded and walked out of the squad room. Sergeant Cotter glowered at Logan a moment, half tempted to continue his haranguing, then he shrugged and followed the first sergeant.

"I'll show you around," Shuba said quietly to Logan.

He started out of the squad room. Logan hesitated, then

followed. Shuba led the way to the troop latrine, a long shed some distance behind the barracks. It was lighted by a lantern hung on the outside and two dim lanterns inside.

There was no one in the latrine at the moment and Shuba faced Logan. "What's the game, Logan?" he demanded then.

"Game?"

"Did you enlist in the Seventh just to hound me?"

Logan shook his head. "I was under the impression you were in the Third."

"I was, but that damn lie you started about me caused me too much trouble. I got a transfer a week ago and now here you are. I don't like it."

"All right, Shuba," snapped Logan. "I don't like it either. And I don't like *you*."

"That goes double for me. The Army ain't big enough to hold both of us."

"I just enlisted," said Logan. "I'm in for five years."

"I got two years to go on this hitch myself," snarled Shuba. "And I ain't gonna serve them with you around."

"That's up to you."

"We'll see about that. I can make you a lot of trouble."

"You won't cause me any trouble," Logan said, "because I know you're a coward."

"I ain't gonna take that from you!" cried Shuba. "I know something about you——"

Logan reached out and grabbed the corporal by his shirt front. "What do you think you know, Shuba?"

"Take your hands off me," screamed the corporal.

"I asked you what you think you know about me?"

"Plenty. I know you been riding with the Missouri boys . . ."

Contemptuously Logan shoved the corporal away from him. "You don't know a damn thing."

"Don't I? What were you doing in the Black Hills?"

"It's a free country."

"You were on the dodge. The law's after you back in Missouri and Nebraska. You been riding with the Jameses and the Youngers——"

"So I quit that for thirteen dollars a month in the Army?" Logan asked mockingly.

"Things got too hot for you. You joined the Army to lay low until things cool off."

"Oh, hell!" said Logan in disgust. He turned away from the corporal and started out of the latrine. Shuba ran after him and caught his arm.

"You hear me, Logan? You spread that story about me and I tell the captain about *you*."

"Tell and be damned."

"I'm warning you!"

Logan pulled his arm free of the corporal's grip and continued on to the barracks. Shuba followed him to the door, but remained outside.

In the squad room Logan was surprised to find his bed made up, his gear laid out neatly. A blond giant with the palest blue eyes got up from the adjoining bunk and bowed elaborately. "Trooper Von Brandenburg, at your service," he said in a heavy Teutonic accent.

"The Baron hisself," volunteered a stocky, redheaded soldier. He held out his hand. "I'm McCloskey and I can lick any Irishman in the regiment."

"I'm not Irish," said Logan, shaking hands with the redhead.

"Nor am I," the big blond said, extending his hand. "For that matter, I am not a baron either. Nor is it likely that I will ever be, even if my brother should happen to die."

"The Kaiser's mad at him," chuckled McCloskey. "He dassn't go home to Deutschland."

"Oh, I can go home any time," declared Von Brandenburg. "In fact, they'd like very much if I returned to Germany—so they could throw me in jail."

Corporal Shuba entered the squad room. He drew a deep breath and came up to the group around Logan's bunk. He scanned the newly made-up cot. "Guess they didn't teach you how to make up a bed in the old Army. Here—" He grabbed an edge of the top blanket and ripped it back. "Make it over neat, the ends tucked in, no wrinkles."

"Hey," cried McCloskey, "*I* made up that bed."

The corporal turned on the Irishman. "Oh, did you now? You don't have enough work of your own to keep you busy, is that it? Let me see your carbine. . . ."

Scowling, McCloskey went to the rack in the center of the room. He took out his carbine and brought it to the corporal. "I cleaned it just a half hour ago."

The corporal pulled out the bolt, peered down the barrel. "Not bad. Not good either, but not bad. Ah!"—He poked a forefinger down into the bolt action—"Oil! A well-kept carbine don't have any surplus oil in it. Clean it out, McCloskey, and while you're at it, give the barrel a good cleaning."

McCloskey regarded the corporal murderously, but got his cleaning materials. Shuba looked at the big German trooper. "And you, Dutchman, haven't *you* got anything to do but stand there gawking? Is your carbine clean?"

"That it is," replied Von Brandenburg promptly. "And my bed is made up neatly."

"How long is it since you've done kitchen police?"

"A week it is, Corporal, a week since First Sergeant Otis put me on kitchen police." The German emphasized the name of the first sergeant who was the only man who could put a soldier on kitchen police.

"And latrine duty?" pursued Shuba.

"Today."

Shuba grinned wolfishly. "So you're the one left it in such bad shape. Well, now, I think you'd just better get yourself a broom and go out there and give the place a good sweeping. And take along the recruit. Might as well break him in properly."

The German was white in the face, but he drew himself up stiffly. "Yes, sir!"

He left the squad room. Logan followed.

Outside Logan said to Von Brandenburg, "I'm sorry, Baron."

"Dot new corporal," exclaimed Von Brandenburg, "I catch him alone sometime I teach him something."

"I've got first crack at him, Baron. You're only catching it now because of me."

"You mean you know the corporal?"

"I've met him before. He hates my guts because of something I know about him."

"What?"

"I think I'll keep that to myself for a while."

"Perhaps you are right, but I am thinking if this corporal goes with us sometime when we are fighting the Indian he might catch a bullet in his back that wasn't shot by an Indian."

6

The following morning, even before breakfast, Corporal Shuba ordered Logan to sweep out the squad room. After breakfast he assigned him to sweeping the corridors. That took Logan's time until the drill period.

The drill this morning was saber drill, with which Logan was familiar but rusty. Shuba neglected the rest of his squad to concentrate on correcting Logan, yelling at him continuously in a strident voice.

The cavalrymen took care of their own horses and when

the mounts were stabled that afternoon, Logan was kept in the stable long after the other soldiers were dismissed, currying his mount, cleaning gear and putting the horse stall in spic and span condition. After supper, fortunately for Logan, the corporal went into Bismarck, and Logan was able to relax on his bunk.

"I know the saloon he hangs out in," McCloskey volunteered to Logan. "We could go into town and beat the daylights out of him."

"Too public," Logan said.

"All right, we could wait until he left the saloon. There's a dark spot he's got to cross to where he gets the Army ambulance back to the Fort. We could take him on there."

"He'd still know it was me. In fact, I want him to know it's me when I take him on, but it's got to be in a situation where he's got no comeback. Like, for instance, if he attacked me and I had to defend myself."

"There'd have to be witnesses," declared Von Brandenburg.

"Neutral witnesses," Logan said. He got up from the bunk. "I think I'll go down to the sutler's."

McCloskey brightened. "For a glass of beer?"

"Yes."

Then McCloskey's face fell. "It's the nineteenth of the month and sure I've spent all my pay and used up my credit."

"I've money."

"You'll stand treat?"

"Why not?"

"Then what's holding us back?"

"Baron?"

"The sutler's beer is bad beer, but bad beer is better than no beer at all, so let us drink bad beer."

There were at least seventy-five soldiers crowded around the bar at the sutler's store. After the second beer, Logan looked around the group thoughtfully.

"Officers don't drink here, I take it."

"Uh-uh," replied McCloskey. "They got a club of their own."

"But they come here to buy things, don't they?"

"If they need something bad enough. Usually they do their buying in town. Don't worry, the officers won't bother us here."

"I wasn't thinking of that." Logan hesitated. "I was wondering about a Lieutenant Dressen . . ."

McCloskey grimaced. "You know him?"

"I knew a Lieutenant Dressen some years ago. I was wondering if this was the same one."

"Fella about thirty-three, thirty-four. Tall, as mean as they come. Goes by the book and he's written some of the chapters hisself." McCloskey rapped his knuckles on the bar. "I'm glad he's in Troop C. Our own lieutenant's bad enough. Dekker's not too bad, but Mundt is a real whizzer."

"What do you think of Captain Dykes?"

McCloskey appealed to Von Brandenburg. "You tell him, Baron."

"A good man. Strict, but honest."

McCloskey nodded agreement. "Only thing wrong about him is he don't like the general."

"Custer?"

McCloskey looked around cautiously. "I know, he's a hero. The boy general. He ain't never forgot that. The hero of Gettysburg, Yellow Tavern, Appomattox. Longhair, the Injun fighter. Major General George Armstrong Custer, who had to go down to mere lieutenant colonel after the war, which he don't like."

"And *I* will say," put in Von Brandenburg, "that I don't agree with our friend at all. I think General Custer is one of the greatest cavalrymen the world has ever known. In my country, they study his tactics in the military schools——"

"Sure, he can lead a cavalry charge," said McCloskey. "I grant you that. He ain't afraid of nothing. That's fine, when you're fighting soldiers who fight by the rules. But the Sioux ain't never learned any rules, and before the general licks them he's going to get a lot of good soldiers killed. Maybe you, maybe me."

"We are not at war with the Indian," said Von Brandenburg.

"Who says we ain't?" demanded McCloskey. "The Sioux? Just take yourself a little ride out in the country and let a few Sioux see you all alone. They may not be at war, but they'll scalp you just the same. I hear tell they especially like long yellow hair, like you got, Baron. You and the general."

"Let's talk about our corporal," suggested Logan.

"Pah," spat out McCloskey. "Not while I'm drinkin' this good beer. Just thinkin' of Shuba's enough to make me puke."

"He does not like you," Von Brandenburg said to Logan. "I am thinking you said you'd met him before you came to Fort Lincoln."

Logan nodded. "Yes, I met him, all right." He took a sip of beer. "He's trying to make me desert."

"You going to?" cried McCloskey.

Logan shook his head. "Shuba can't make me."

"I wouldn't be too sure about that. There's only so much

a man can take and Shuba's been riding you pretty hard. One of these days you're going to take a crack at him and then you'll wish you *had* gone over the hill."

"I won't desert!"

Logan stopped. Alice Wilder had entered the sutler's store. She stopped just inside the door, shot an apprehensive glance toward the soldiers at the bar, then averting her eyes, moved quickly toward the far side of the room where there were a couple of counters containing merchandise.

The sutler himself came out from his private quarters and moved to wait on the girl.

Logan set his glass upon the bar. "Excuse me, fellows."

He started across the room, leaving the astonished McCloskey and Von Brandenburg to stare after him.

The sutler, wrapping soap for Alice, looked past her as Logan approached.

"Easy, soldier!" he cautioned.

Alice Wilder looked over her shoulder, then whirled to face Logan.

"Mr. Logan!"

"*Private* Logan."

"You've enlisted! But why?"

"It's a job."

"Thirteen dollars a month." She frowned. "I heard something about you at Fort Meade . . ." Then she became flustered. "I'm getting as bad as these Army women. Silly gossip." She stopped. "I'm sorry. I'm just making things worse."

"What you're trying to ask," said Logan, "is, did I *have* to enlist in the Army? That's the usual thing; a man gets into trouble on the outside, he enlists in the Army until things blow over."

Alice Wilder winced. "Forget that I said anything. I—I'm glad to see you again. I'm alive today because of you."

"I was saving my own life at the time."

"But you could have run—like that corporal."

"He had a horse. I didn't."

"You could have grabbed one easily enough. But you didn't." She made a gesture of dismissal. "I won't embarrass you again by talking about it. You've got to meet Harriet, my sister."

"She's married to a lieutenant."

"Lieutenant Dressen. Can you come to dinner tomorrow? I'm sure it'll be all right with Harriet."

"But it won't be all right with the lieutenant," Logan said wryly. "You forget, I'm a private. I can't visit at the home of an officer."

"That's absurd. Jim won't mind."

"That's where you're wrong. He'll mind very much. And if he didn't his captain would. And so would Captain Dykes, my own commanding officer."

Alice showed disappointment. "I never will get the hang of this Army protocol. Just because one man's a lieutenant and another a private——"

"I could meet you away from the post," Logan said. "In Bismarck perhaps."

Alice brightened. "We go there all the time, Harriet and I. As a matter of fact, she said something about going there tomorrow afternoon. . . ."

Logan winced. "I've no free time during the day. Technically, I'm off evenings, unless I'm on guard or Corporal Shuba finds something for me to do——"

"Shuba!" exclaimed Alice. "The corporal who——"

"The same. He got a transfer from Fort Meade and by the damnedest fluke I wound up in his troop. To make it even worse, in his squad. He's been riding me pretty hard."

"Can he do that?"

"He's doing it."

"He hates you because you know how he acted at—at the fight with the Indians." Alice frowned. "But can't you tell your captain about that?"

"No," Logan said quickly. "It's something I've got to work out myself."

"Would it help any if I told Jim, my brother-in-law? He's an officer."

Logan said evenly, "Just tell Lieutenant Dressen that you know a man named Tom Logan."

Alice regarded him quizzically. "The first time I ever mentioned Jim's name to you, you looked as you're looking now. What is it? Do you know him?"

"I once knew a man named Dressen. I'm not sure if your brother-in-law is the same Dressen or not."

"And if he is?" Alice paused, then went on, "There's something about you that—that almost makes me afraid of you." Then she drew a deep breath and shook her head. "About tomorrow; how will I know if you can go to Bismarck?"

"You won't. If I'm off I'll be there about seven or seven-thirty. If I'm not, I just won't be there."

"That's not very satisfactory, is it?"

Logan shrugged. "I'm in the Army."

She smiled wanly. "Yes, I guess you are." She turned to the sutler who had been hovering near by. "Will you charge this to Lieutenant Dressen?"

"It's already charged, ma'am."

Alice nodded to Logan. "Tomorrow—I hope. . . ."

She left the store. Logan looked after her. McCloskey came across the room. "For a recruit, you're doing all right."

7

Logan did not see Alice Wilder the following day. Immediately after breakfast, Corporal Shuba put him to cleaning up the squad room and the halls. He drilled with the troop until eleven thirty, and in the half hour before lunch Shuba found another small job of cleaning for him.

During lunch Von Brandenburg said to Logan, "I see you have caught guard duty with me tonight."

Logan winced. "I haven't even had time to look at the bulletin board."

He looked as soon as he finished eating. It was the troop's regular guard turn, and the list had no doubt been made out by First Sergeant Otis, but Logan noted that Corporal Shuba was down as one of the three corporals. He felt certain that he would wind up on Shuba's relief, which meant also that he would be assigned the worst post.

He was.

Guard mount was at five o'clock and after the ceremonies were over, Logan found that he was on the third relief, assigned to Post #7. From Von Brandenburg he learned that Post #7 was inside the stables.

"You don't carry no carbine," said the German. "You think that sounds easy, maybe? Just go around from one barn to another, see that the horses are all tied up nice. You will be surprised how many horses are loose, no matter how often you go around. You will be rassling mit 'em all the time. Not one minute to rest. Give me Post Number One, where you got to march back and forth in front of the guardhouse, at attention all the time."

"That's what you've got, Post Number One?"

Von Brandenburg grimaced. "Mit dot damn Corporal Shuba? I have Number Nine, out by the picket lines, the shpookiest place around the Fort. Indians creeping around, at least you think you are seeing them all the time."

"I'm sorry, Baron," said Logan. "You got that because Shuba knows you're a friend of mine."

"Oh, sure," said the German philosophically. He chuckled.

"I on'y hope Shuba comes sneakin' around. Maybe I mistake him for a verdammte Sioux."

The outer wall of the guardhouse formed part of the stockade. It consisted of a large room, which contained a couple of individual cells and double-deck cots for the soldier prisoners. An outer room was the guardroom for the sentries, where they slept in the hours when they were not actually walking post. Being on the third relief, Logan's tour of duty did not come until nine thirty, and he slept for a couple of hours after dinner.

He was awakened by Corporal Shuba who kicked his cot. "Rise and shine, soldier!"

Logan rose from the cot and joined the soldiers who constituted the third relief. Corporal Shuba assembled them outside of the guardhouse and posted the new guard for Post #1. Then he marched the others off, leaving two men at the gate of the stockade. Others were dispersed at strategic spots on the compound. As the new guards took their posts the relieved men fell into ranks and continued the rounds.

Soon they reached Post #7 and Logan faced the sentry.

"General orders cover," the sentry who was being relieved told Logan. "Special orders are that you are to go continually through the three stables and secure all stock that may be loose."

"You'll find a nice haystack in back of the barns," Corporal Shuba put in sarcastically. "You can grab yourself a nice two-hour nap there. But be sure to brush yourself off before you're relieved, because if I find any hay on your uniform you'll finish your nap in the guardhouse."

With that parting thrust Shuba marched off his detachment. Logan shook his head and entered the first of the three great stables. It contained well over a hundred horses and was lighted dimly by four lanterns hung from the low rafters.

In spite of the fact that the previous sentry had made his rounds only a short time before, Logan found three horses wandering about. He secured two of them in vacant stalls without much difficulty, but the third was a fractious animal; it took the best part of ten minutes to catch it and then it tried to bite his arm. He finally secured the animal, however, but by then a new horse was loose.

In the second stable only a single horse was loose, but in the third he found six of the beasts wandering around. He secured them all, then made his way to the first stable.

He entered. Leaning against a post, under one of the lanterns was a tall, well-built soldier wearing the insignia of a first lieutenant.

"Hello, Tom," he said casually.

It was Jim Dressen.

He had matured well. He was as tall as Logan, but twelve to fifteen pounds heavier. His face had a strength in it that Logan did not remember. His years as an officer had given him assurance. And arrogance.

"You don't show it," Logan said.

Dressen chuckled. "That's a cryptic remark that's supposed to mean something."

"I was referring to the deaths of nine men."

"Sure," Dressen said easily. "Me and Abe Lincoln. We started the war so we're responsible for everyone that got killed in it." He regarded Logan thoughtfully. "So you're still in the hero business. I had a hunch when my wife's sister told about the Indian business that it was you. You shouldn't have come here, though."

"Why not?"

"Things have changed."

"Ah, yes. You're Lieutenant James Dressen now."

"That's right, Tom."

"How'd you wangle a commission after your war record?"

"My war record? Why, it's pretty good. I escaped from Andersonville Prison in 'Sixty-four——"

"You *escaped?*"

"That's right. And I got an honorable discharge from the Army a little later. Then, in 'Sixty-seven when they were holding examinations for officers I took the exam—and passed. They made me a second lieutenant. Now I'm a first and in a year or two I'll be a captain. I'm a good soldier."

"And a good murderer!"

Dressen exhaled lightly. "I was afraid you'd be like this. That was ten years ago. . . ."

"I haven't forgotten. Have you?" Logan lashed at Dressen.

The lieutenant shrugged. "It doesn't bother me. I can live with it. I can live with it a lot better than I could live with you." His lips curled in contempt. "You were always the leader, Tom, but who made you the leader? You? When the chips were down, you didn't have anything to back it up. I came through. Do you know how much difference there is between a first lieutenant and a private in the peacetime Army?"

"I know, all right."

"Then get wise to yourself. I could make things pretty rough for you."

"Oh, you will. I can count on you for *that.*"

The good humor faded from Dressen's face. "Just because I'm in the Army doesn't mean I don't know what's going

on in the world. I saw your name in the paper a while ago. There was a bank robbed over in Missouri. The James Boys, but *your* name was mentioned."

"Get in touch with the civilian authorities, Dressen. You will, anyway, because you're that kind of a skunk. Tell them you know where I am. Maybe they'll want me and maybe they won't. But in the meantime I'm here."

"That's a threat, Tom?"

"I made my threat eleven years ago."

"It won't do you any good. A trooper's word against that of an officer."

"It isn't worth a damn, is it? You've got nothing to worry about, have you?"

"I'm not worried."

"Aren't you?"

Dressen said savagely, "I'm warning you, Logan. One word out of you, one move against me . . ."

He stopped. Logan laughed shortly. For a moment the eyes of the two met and held. Then Dressen walked past Logan, out of the stable.

It was moments before Logan became aware that a horse was wandering about in the stable. He finally shook himself and caught the animal.

He continued his rounds until eleven thirty, when he was relieved by the corporal of the first relief. He marched back to the guardhouse, slept for about three hours and at three thirty in the morning again marched out with Corporal Shuba to resume his patrol of the stables. This would be his last tour for the night, lasting until five thirty in the morning.

Logan rounded up three horses in the first stable. Two were loose in the second and two in the third. He returned to the first stable for his second round. A single horse was loose and he tied it in a stall.

The stall was in the center of the barn, near one of the feeble lanterns. As he stepped out of the stall, the horse kicked at Logan. The act saved his life. He jumped aside—and a bullet smacked into a post inches from Logan's head.

Logan threw himself to the floor, but came up instantly. He started running forward. But he was too late. A door slammed at the far end of the stable.

Logan rushed to the door and whipped it open. He plunged into the night—and stopped. The man who had fired at him could have gone in any direction.

Logan re-entered the stable and found the post in which the bullet that had missed him so narrowly was embedded. With a penknife he dug it out. It was a .45 revolver slug.

It told him nothing. As corporal of the guard, Shuba was wearing a revolver. Dressen had been unarmed, but as an officer he owned a .45. He put the slug in his pocket.

The bullet had been no threat. Only Logan's sudden jump aside had saved his life.

Shuba, or Dressen?

Dawn came shortly after four thirty and Logan, who had remained inside the stable, ventured outside. He circled the barn, but picking up a bootprint was a hopeless task. A hundred troopers went in and out of the stable in the course of a day. All wore army boots.

The stable sergeant appeared shortly after five o'clock. "Everything all right?" he asked.

"Fine."

The sergeant went into the barn and Logan waited for his relief to show up. It came a few minutes after five thirty, and Logan marched back to the bunkhouse.

Corporal Shuba was sprawled on a cot, apparently asleep. His revolver reposed in the holster that was belted about his waist. For a moment Logan was tempted to try to slip the revolver out of the holster and see if it had been fired recently. Shuba was too careful a villain for that, however. If it had been he who had taken the shot at Logan, he would have cleaned his revolver by now.

Logan sat down on a cot.

Von Brandenburg came over. "How'd it go?"

Logan took the chunk of lead from his pocket. "Somebody took a shot at me."

The German's eyes went instantly toward the sleeping corporal. "Dis is serious!"

"Maybe it wasn't him."

"Who else?" Von Brandenburg shook his head. "Riding a man is one thing, but murder . . ." He looked thoughtfully at Logan. "Does he hate you *dot* much?"

"He's a coward," Logan said, "and I know it. I called him a yellow skunk in front of some people. He's got to make me desert . . . or kill me."

"Ja," said Von Brandenburg, nodding. "I can understand that. Well, there's only one thing for you to do."

"What's that?"

"Desert."

"No. Shuba can't make me run out."

"Then you've got to kill him."

"I can't—unless he makes a move against me."

Von Brandenburg pointed at the bullet in Logan's hand. "What's that?"

"I don't know for sure if Shuba fired this at me. I didn't actually see him."

"Who else would do it?"

Logan shrugged. "It might have been someone else."

"Nobody else hates you like Shuba."

"Yes," said Logan, "there's a man here who hates me worse than Shuba does."

The German stared at Logan. "How could a man hate you more than Shuba? You said you called him a coward in front of people. What could be worse than that . . . if he really was a coward?"

Logan shook his head. "I can't tell you, Baron."

"It's like dot, eh?" Von Brandenburg sat down beside Logan. "In Germany, I killed a man. It was a duel and he challenged me. The Kaiser has forbidden duels, but his law is not enforced too strictly. That is not the reason I cannot go back to Germany. It is—well, the man I fought was an amateur with a saber. I did not want to fight him, but he would not have it any other way. So—I had to kill him. And if I go back I must kill his two brothers and at least six other relations. So—I am here in America." He paused. "Why are *you* in the Army? Your are not the kind of man who would enlist as a common trooper. Is it—because of this other enemy—the man who is worse than our corporal?"

Logan hesitated, then nodded.

8

After a tour of guard duty a trooper was not supposed to be given any duties for at least eight hours. But Logan did not trust Corporal Shuba. If he were available he would be given something disagreeable to do. Shortly after breakfast, Logan scribbled a note and handed it to Von Brandenburg.

"Do me a favor," he said. "Deliver this to the sister-in-law of Lieutenant Dressen—Alice Wilder."

The trooper regarded Logan with a frown on his face. "An officer's relation? That can only mean trouble."

"I'm going to Bismarck, and I want to see her in town."

Von Brandenburg hesitated, then shrugged. "All right, I'll deliver it."

"To the girl herself."

"Sure, I see to dot."

Instead of going to his bunk, Logan sauntered out of the squad room and made his way to the stables. Since most of

the troops were preparing for drill, it was no trouble for him to secure his own mount. He rode it out of the Fort.

Bismarck was a raw frontier town on the north side of the Missouri. Logan crossed on the ferry and rode into the town.

He saw a half-dozen soldiers, all engaged on some official task or other. None questioned his presence in the village, apparently assuming that he was there on some miltary errand. It was only eight thirty and he could not expect to see Alice Wilder for some time. It was possible that she could not come to town until afternoon.

He had a second breakfast in a restaurant adjoining the single hotel in the village. He killed a half hour at the railroad depot and another half hour strolling up and down the main street. He was not at ease, however. An idle soldier, at this hour of the day, was an object of note. He adjourned to the hotel, found a rocking chair facing the window and sat in it for an hour or so, when he found the attention of the hotel proprietor upon him.

Irritably he rose and left the hotel. On the street he untied his mount from the hitchrail and climbing aboard rode out of town at a trot. Outside the town limit he stopped. The road ahead led to the ferry and to the Fort. It was a well-traveled road, with a heavy soldier traffic—soldiers who had business in town. Logan had none legitimately. He was rather sure, too, that he was not supposed to be absent from the post, even though the eight hours following his tour of guard duty were supposedly his own.

He rode a mile toward the ferry, turned his horse and rode back. He repeated the process twice more.

And then he saw her.

She was astride a horse, coming toward him at a swift trot. He pulled up his horse.

She recognized him while he was still some distance away.

"Hello!" she called.

He gave her a salute as she came up.

"I'm sorry," she apologized. "I didn't get your message until an hour ago."

"It's all right. I was prepared to wait."

"I think I'd better tell you right away what the soldier —your friend—told me to tell you. It's about Corporal Shuba; he's looking for you."

"Why?"

"Something about being A.W.O.L. from the Fort."

Logan exclaimed angrily, "I just got off guard duty this morning. I'm supposed to have eight hours off."

"I'm only passing on what your friend told me to tell you."

"I know." Logan looked toward the town. "Perhaps we'd better not be seen together in town." He grimaced and added, "For your sake."

"I'm not afraid to be seen with you, but you may be right, perhaps we'd better ride off." She looked inquiringly at Logan.

He turned his horse north, across the prairie. They rode side by side and Alice kept shooting side glances at Logan. He was well aware of them, but rode in silence for a few moments. Then he said, "Lieutenant Dressen's talked to you about me?"

She nodded.

"What did he say?"

"I don't think I should tell you."

"To put it plainly, Jim Dressen doesn't like me. He doesn't like me a lot."

"He said you were an outlaw."

"Is that all?"

"Not exactly. He"—she stopped, looking at Logan—"You didn't tell me you'd served under him."

"*I* served under him?"

"Didn't you?"

"That's an odd way of putting it. It just happens that *he* served under me."

"That isn't what he said."

Logan smiled crookedly. "Just how well do you know this brother-in-law of yours?"

"Quite well. I mean—he and Harriet visited at our home two years ago for a month. And I'd met him once or twice before."

"When did your sister marry him?"

"Four years ago." She hesitated. "She met him in St. Louis, while visiting with a cousin of ours. It was a rather quick courtship. The family didn't meet him until after they were married."

"What do you know about his background—I mean, before he married your sister?"

"What's there to know? He's an Army man. It's the only thing he's ever done."

"He told you he was a West Pointer?"

"No. He . . ." Again Alice hesitated. "As a matter of fact, that's the one thing that bothers him. He says the West Pointers are a clannish lot, discriminate against the officers who came up through the ranks. During the war. Well, *you* were with him then for a while. Or weren't you?"

"Oh, yes. I was with him all right."

She pulled up her horse and kneed it around so that she faced him. "All right," she said, "let's have it."

"Dressen?"

"Yes. You've been making all sorts of hints about him ever since I've known you. Now, let's have your side of it."

He shook his head. "Dressen hasn't told you?"

"He has. He's told me all of it, but you say it isn't true. You've got Harriet all worked up about it."

"I haven't even met your sister!"

"I guess I'll have to take the blame then, for telling her the —the dirty hints you've been making about Jim."

"Let me ask one question," Logan said grimly. "What time did Dressen come in last night?"

"He was on duty last night."

"Guard?"

"I suppose so. I didn't ask."

"He wasn't the officer of the day."

"I didn't say he was. I'm not an Army wife. I don't know what soldiers do at night." Her forehead wrinkled into a frown. "But there you go again, hinting at something—something dark about Jim."

"Perhaps we'd better get on another subject."

"No. It's gone too far for that. I want the truth."

"You wouldn't believe it."

"What *is* the truth?"

"What has Dressen told you?"

"That you were an outlaw, that you once soldiered under him and that there'd been trouble between you and him."

"He didn't say what kind of trouble?"

"If you must know, he said you resented his rank. You were jealous of him."

"I was jealous because he was a sergeant?"

"That was in the early part of the war. Jim was an officer after the Battle of Gettysburg. A captain."

Logan regarded her sharply. "A captain?"

"Yes. What's wrong about that? Custer was a general, and I don't think he was more than a year or two older than Jim."

Logan drew in a deep breath and let the air out slowly. "Dressen wasn't at the Battle of Gettysburg."

"You don't know that. You weren't there yourself."

"I wasn't. That's right. But neither was Jim Dressen. At the time of Gettysburg we were both of us prisoners of the Rebs."

She looked at him in astonishment. "You expect me to believe that?"

"You said you wanted the truth."

"But that's ridiculous. That's one thing I'm sure about. That Jim was never a prisoner of the Confederates."

"No?" said Logan. "What did he do, then, after the Battle of Gettysburg?"

"He was a scout, rather, a government spy, I think you would say. He worked in western Virginia—against the guerrilla, Colonel Mosby."

"Until then?"

"For the duration. That's why he wasn't promoted again after Gettysburg. He never took part in any battles, and his work was so secret that—" She faltered. "You're going to say that isn't true?"

"Is it?"

"Yes!" Her voice became suddenly fierce. "Harrriet told me the whole thing last night. We sat up until one o'clock this morning." Her voice rose to a shout. "Harriet has never lied to me!"

"I think," Logan said slowly, "we'd better ride back."

She turned her horse abruptly, touched its flank with a heel and the horse galloped off. Logan followed at a modest pace.

Three or four hundred yards ahead of him, Alice Wilder pulled her horse to a walk, then finally halted it. She waited until Logan came up.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I had no right to yell at you. I owe you my life."

"Forget it."

"My life?" Her color, already high, deepened. "I happen to value my life."

"You misunderstood me," Logan said evenly. "I had no right to question you about your brother-in-law. Your sister's married to him, and I guess you owe her a certain loyalty."

"Please—let's talk about something else."

He shook his head. "It's between us. You have to be on his side and I . . ." He let his words trail off.

"And you're his enemy!"

He nodded.

There was no more to say. They turned into the road leading to the ferry and Fort Lincoln beyond.

As they got off the boat, Logan said, "I think you'd better ride ahead."

She nodded. "I'm going home on Saturday."

"Where's that?"

"Illinois. A little town below Bloomington—McLean's."

"Good-bye, then."

"Good-bye." She gathered up her reins, said, "And thanks!" Then she spurred her horse ahead.

Logan watched her go and there was a strange emptiness in him that he had never known before. He sighed wearily and rode into the Fort.

He stabled his horse, rubbed it down and started for the barracks of Troop C.

Corporal Shuba stood outside the orderly room, watching him approach.

"Where've you been?"

"I've been off duty."

"Who said so?"

"That's a regulation."

"Oh, you're going to give me the regulations now, are you? Maybe you'd better tell them to the top. He's been looking for you, too."

Logan walked past Shuba, into the orderly room. Sergeant Otis was making out his day book. "Oh, Logan!"

"Corporal Shuba said you were looking for me."

Sergeant Otis grimaced. "He was in here beefing about your being A.W.O.L. You were on guard last night? You have eight hours off, then, regardless of Shuba."

"That's what I thought."

Otis shook his head. "I know what's been going on, Logan. Isn't much I miss. Shuba's been riding you. There isn't a lot I can do about it, unless he steps over the line onto my toes. I just wanted you to know that I'm aware of things. I size you up as a man who can take care of himself."

"Shuba won't break me."

"I hope not. And I'm going to see that he won't. I don't give a damn what a man's done outside of the Army. I do care what he does here. You've done all right and your record is clean." He hesitated. "The general's brother, Captain Tom Custer, wants ten men. It's a rather ticklish job and the men have to be picked carefully. I put your name down."

"That's all right."

"I'll leave it to you. If you'd rather not go, I'll put in another man. You see, Corporal Shuba's name came up. It's his turn and I didn't stop to think when I made up the list and put your name down."

"Shuba's in charge of the detail?"

"Under Captain Custer. Captain Tom isn't the general. But the general"—Sergeant Otis frowned—"he doesn't favor his relatives, I don't mean to imply that. Well, the job's to bring in a murderer—a Sioux chief, named Rain-in-the-Face. There may be some trouble."

"When do I report to Captain Custer?"

"Tonight. Right after supper. Captain Custer feels that you can't make a move out of the Fort without the news getting to the Indians. He wants to make a quick move against Rain-in-the-Face."

Mess call sounded as Logan was leaving the orderly room. He went to the mess hall, and Von Brandenburg seated himself beside Logan.

"You see Shuba?"

"It's all right."

"Dot is good. I was worried." The Baron smirked. "Your Miss Wilder, she is very beautiful. I do not blame you."

Logan looked at the German in surprise. "Beautiful?"

"*Ach!* One of the most beautiful women . . ." The Baron gave Logan a curious look. "Don't you think so?"

Logan had not been aware of Alice Wilder's beauty. She was Jim Dressen's sister-in-law, a source of potential information. Beautiful? Yes, she probably was beautiful—as women go.

Von Brandenburg continued, "If she was not related to an officer, I would myself give you some competition. But an officer's relation—*ach,* that can only mean trouble. Which reminds me, the lieutenant was at home when I delivered your message."

"You didn't give it to him?" Logan asked quickly.

"No-no, you told me to hand it to the young lady herself. I did, even though the lieutenant gave me a—what do you call it?—a dressing down."

"Did you see Dressen's wife?"

"It was Mrs. Dressen who came to the door when I knocked. A fine-looking woman, if she was not so nervous." The Baron paused. "I have been thinking, this enemy of yours—this man who hates you more than our fine corporal, this would be Lieutenant Dressen perhaps?"

"Perhaps."

"Then I would like to give you a warning." Von Brandenburg glanced around the table and lowered his voice to a whisper. "After I returned from delivering your message, ten, fifteen minutes, the lieutenant came here. He talked to the corporal, *ja,* Shuba, for a long time. I have been thinking, perhaps your two enemies have, shall we say, joined forces?"

That would not be good, Logan thought. Shuba was only a corporal. He could make things miserable for Logan, but he was a physical coward and his rank was low. There was only so much he could do to Logan. But an officer, a senior first lieutenant, with an underling to help him. . . .

It was not good.

Von Brandenburg was saying, "So we will have to keep an eye on him all the time. It is so easy to say that a bullet came from an Indian, somewhere in the dark."

"You're going on the detail tonight?"

"*Ja,* sure. And the Irisher too. Are we not friends of yours?"

Logan frowned. "But Sergeant Otis made out the list."

Von Brandenburg shrugged. "All I know is dot we are all on it and Corporal Shuba is in charge."

"Under Captain Custer."

Von Brandenburg grimaced. "Captain Custer, who would be a nice bookkeeper in some small business, if his brother were not the famous general. I do not blame the general. A man has to take care of his family, you understand. But fighting Indians is a serious business and me, I like to keep my blond hair."

9

The ten enlisted men who led their horses out of the stable shortly after supper were a hard-bitten lot. Logan and Von Brandenburg were the only ones who did not wear the service stripe, indicating five years' service. One man had four such stripes, another two.

Corporal Shuba lined up the men in front of Troop C Barracks, and they then had a wait of fifteen minutes before an orderly rode up with Captain Custer's gray horse. There was another wait of ten minutes until Captain Custer came strolling along.

Corporal Shuba stepped in front of the squad. " 'Tenshun!"

The men came to attention and Shuba saluted the captain. Custer returned the salute, then walked down the line of soldiers. He studied each man carefully, finally nodded approval.

"A good squad, Corporal," he said to Shuba. "Which are the scouts?"

"Scouts, sir?"

"There were to be two scouts."

"I was not informed about the scouts, sir."

Captain Custer exclaimed petulantly, "Must I do everything myself? Headquarters told me that there would be ten enlisted men and two Indian scouts. Here are the ten men, but no scouts. You"—he pointed down the line at random and his finger came to rest on Logan—"run over to Headquarters and ask them about the scouts. On the double!"

Logan gave the reins of his horse to Von Brandenburg to hold and started swiftly across the drill ground to the Headquarters Building.

As he pounded up to Headquarters, he noticed two men in buckskins, lounging on the ground by two saddled mounts, a packhorse and another horse without a saddle. One was an Arikari Indian, the other a half-breed Sioux.

"You men happen to be the scouts that are supposed to go with Captain Custer?" Logan asked.

The half-breed shrugged. "If we're really going with him. We on'y been waitin' here for about two hours."

Logan pointed across the parade ground. "The troop's waiting over there."

"We wait here," said the half-breed. "They gotta pass this way."

Logan hesitated, then shrugged and trotted back across the parade ground. He saluted Captain Custer.

"The scouts are waiting in front of Headquarters, sir."

"What're they doing there?" demanded Custer.

"They said you had to pass that way to leave the post, sir."

"That makes no difference," exclaimed Custer. "I want them here—on the double!"

Logan saluted and ran back across the parade ground. "You're to join the troop over there," he told the half-breed scout.

"We'd on'y have to come back this way," protested the scout.

"I think you'd better do it just the same."

"Longhair's little brother makes a lot of fuss," snapped the scout. He turned to the Arikari and spoke to him in his own tongue.

The Arikari replied and got to his feet. He spat contemptuously and mounted his pony.

"All right," said the half-breed, "but he crowds us too much he'll be out there without us."

"You tell him," Logan said shortly.

The scouts rode casually across the parade ground in Logan's wake. Logan saluted the captain when he came up and Custer neglected to return the salute. His eyes were on the scouts as they approached leisurely.

Custer went into a lengthy harangue, which was wasted on the Arikari for his co-scout did not bother to translate. The half-breed, whose name was Winfield, after the general, listened emotionlessly. When the captain finally subsided, he took a chew of tobacco and turned his mount toward the gate.

Petulantly, Custer gave the order to mount, and a few minutes later the troop rode through the gate. Darkness was already settling on the prairie, and before they had gone a mile it was pitch-dark. The scouts led the way at a slow pace and the troop rode until midnight, when Custer finally called a halt.

The horses were picketed and the men rolled up in their blankets. Except for two sentries, who were picked by Corporal Shuba. The sentries, of course, turned out to be Logan and Von Brandenburg.

"No use both of us losing sleep," Logan said, when they

had settled themselves near the picketed horses. "Lie down and I'll call you in a couple of hours."

"That verdammte corporal," groused Von Brandenburg. "He better not come sneaking up in the dark. I shoot him and say I think it was an Indian."

He threw himself to the ground and was soon fast asleep. Logan stood in the darkness near by. A strange restlessness gripped him. For years he had led an aimless life. Deep within him there had been a dark spot that had kept him from the normal pursuits of man. The spot had grown like a canker, but it had been dormant for so long that it had not bothered him much. The days and the years had gone by. He had drifted and lived without purpose.

He had purpose now, but it was smoldering. Not smoldering exactly, either, for the glow was threatening to burst into savage flame and sear so fiercely that it might consume Logan entirely.

He had restrained himself from retaliating to Corporal Shuba's petty maliciousness, but he wondered how long he could endure it. Probably indefinitely, were it not for the fiercer hatred he bore Jim Dressen. Dressen came first. He merited Logan's full hatred. Shuba was only incidental. If the corporal stood in the way Logan would brush him aside. But he had to be careful of that, too. He could not let his retaliation against Shuba interfere with the main task—the destruction of First Lieutenant James Dressen of the Seventh U. S. Cavalry.

The present intruded itself into Logan's mind. He shook his head to clear away the haze of memory and became alert. A horse whickered softly, another stamped its hoofs. Logan brought his carbine up to the ready and strained his ears. He could hear nothing. Except the horses.

They were restless.

He dropped to the ground, pressing his ear to the earth. He heard it then, the drumming of horses' hoofs, distant but steady. He got to his knees and reaching out, found the sleeping form of Von Brandenburg. He touched it and the German was instantly awake.

"Vot is?" he asked in a heavier than usual Teutonic accent.

"Horses, galloping horses."

Von Brandenburg twisted around, pressed his ear to the ground. After a moment he got up. " 'Bout a half mile. Two, maybe t'ree horse."

"I'd better tell the captain," Logan said.

"Ja."

Von Brandenburg got to his feet as Logan moved off to locate the sleeping Captain Custer. The captain was rolled up

in a blanket, snoring softly. Lorgan had to shake him twice before Custer asked, sleepily, "What do you want?"

"I'm the sentry," Logan said. "I thought I should tell you that someone's galloping off to the west."

Custer sat up. "You see him?"

"No, it's too dark. But I heard the horses."

"Horses?"

"There's more than one. Two, perhaps three."

Custer held up his hand for silence. "I don't hear anything."

"Put your ear to the ground, sir."

"Bosh!" snorted Custer. But he obeyed Logan's suggestion. After a moment he sat up. "They're just about gone." He yawned. "We couldn't catch them in the dark anyway. Go back to your post."

"I was thinking," suggested Logan, "that it might be someone from the Fort—riding to warn Rain-in-the-Face——"

"*You* were thinking?" snapped Custer. "I'll do the thinking in this command."

Logan came to attention. "Yes, sir." He saluted Custer, turned and walked back to Von Brandenburg.

"I heard," Von Brandenburg said softly.

"He'll do the thinking," Logan said shortly.

"While he sleeps?"

Custer did not sleep too long. It was still dark when he roused the troopers and got them into the saddle. They rode for an hour, until dawn was breaking over the prairie. Then the leader halted the little detachment so that all could have a quick, cold breakfast. Then they were in the saddle again.

Shortly after they resumed the march, the party cut the trail of some horses. The Arikari and the half-breed studied the trail a moment, then the half-breed reported, "Three horses, going fast. 'Bout three hours ago."

"White or Indian?" the captain asked.

"Two horses wearing shoes, the third Indian pony."

"Two whites and an Indian?"

"Three Indians. Horses stolen from whites. Nail loose, hoof grown over shoe. Cavalry take better care of their horses' hoofs. Indians probably had this one three-four months."

"You think they're riding to warn Rain-in-the-Face?" asked Custer.

The scout shrugged. "I'm a scout, that's all. Captain does the thinking."

Custer regarded him sharply a moment, then tossed his head. "Forward, ho!" he called out.

He led the little column into a swift trot that was mile consuming but tired the horses. By mid-morning he was compelled to call a halt.

The Arikari studied the tracks of the horsemen who had preceded the soldiers. He talked to the half-breed, Winfield, and after a few moments the scout approached Custer.

"Spotted Turtle thinks the Indians are only ten minutes ahead."

"What do *you* think?"

"They rested their horses a while back."

"We're resting ours now."

"Excuse me," said the scout sarcastically, "I thought mebbe you wanted to catch 'em."

"I do."

The scout trotted back to his Indian partner, and the two talked in the Arikari tongue. Custer watched them, then suddenly threw up his hand.

"Prepare to mount!"

"Jeez!" exclaimed McCloskey to Logan and Von Brandenburg. "My horse ain't even caught his wind."

The troopers mounted and Custer threw forward his hand. "Forward, ho!"

He led the way at a swift trot.

Within a mile most of the horses were in trouble, but Custer kept his own horse doggedly in the lead. They topped a low rise, dipped down into a ravine on the other side and began the climb out.

Suddenly Winfield cried out, "Look!"

The others also saw an Indian on a pony, darting out from a clump of brush and galloping wildly toward the top of the ravine.

"Get him!" roared Custer.

He put spurs to his own horse. The troop stormed up the steep ravine on their laboring horses, charging after the fleeing Indian. They crested the top.

A shallow valley fell away on the other side, and two hundred yards down the slope the fugitive Indian was galloping away.

"I want him alive!" cried Custer. "Let's go!"

The eleven men thundered down the slope, past a clump of cottonwoods, out into open ground. Logan, riding swiftly, glanced off to the right. A half mile away, riding diagonally away from the cavalry were two Indians.

"Captain Custer!" Logan called out. "To the right!"

Custer looked off to the right and abruptly pulled up his horse. "It's a trick!" he said angrily.

The troopers milled to a stop around him. One man fell out of the saddle as his horse went down to his knees. Custer whirled on him.

"What's the matter with you?"

"My horse is played out," replied the trooper defensively.

"Mine, too," quickly added another soldier.

Custer's own mount was heaving desperately, and he finally gave it some attention. "Damn it, they pulled a smart one on us. They left one man behind when they saw us, got us to chase him until our horses were ragged, then the other two ride off." His eyes went to Winfield, the scout. "Why didn't you warn me?"

"I tried to," retorted the scout. He pointed off to the north and west. "There's smoke over there."

Custer searched the sky in the direction in which the scout pointed. "I don't see any."

"It ain't much," Winfield said. He took out a plug of tobacco and bit off a chunk. "That's about where you expected to find the Chief."

"Rain-in-the-Face?"

Winfield nodded. "Yep. An' those friends of his are going to get to him before we do."

"Forward!" thundered Custer. "Ho . . . !"

Groans went up among the troopers, but they followed their angry leader, as well as they could, or thought they should. Soon the captain was a hundred yards ahead, then two hundred. The troopers were strung out for a quarter mile behind, a precarious thing in Indian country.

Custer pulled up his horse and waited for the cavalrymen to assemble.

When they were all before him he said, "There'll be no more malingering. The next man who falls behind can consider himself under arrest."

Shuba said, "My horse is pretty tired, sir!"

Captain Custer fixed baleful eyes on the corporal. "You're no better than the others, Corporal."

Shuba winced and McCloskey snickered. The captain's eyes went to McCloskey. "What's your name?"

"Trooper McCloskey, sir!"

"Write his name down, Corporal!"

"Yes, sir," exclaimed Shuba.

"Forward—ho!"

Once more the troopers followed Custer at a swift trot. They kept up bravely, but in spite of their riding efforts a man soon fell behind, then another. Von Brandenburg's horse, carrying the big man's weight, was the next to founder. The German pulled up and dismounted.

Custer looked back and screamed, "Stay there!"

He put spurs to his mount. The animal neighed wildly, leaped forward and fell to its knees. Custer was thrown over

the animal's head. He landed heavily, but climbed to his feet. He signaled to the Arikari, who was leading the unsaddled horse that had been intended as a mount for the prisoner, when they took him.

"Give me that horse!"

The Arikari rode past Custer and the captain drew his revolver. "I said, give me that horse!"

Winfield saved the Indian's life. He rode his own horse into Custer, knocking him aside. "He don't understand you," he cried. Then he yelled in Arikari. The Indian stopped, turned and came back. Angrily Custer jerked the reins of the unsaddled horse from his hand and mounted it.

Without another word of command, he rode off. The troopers followed as well as they were able.

Logan's mount was in great difficulty. He had spared it as much as possible, dismounting in even the brief moments that they were halted. It was a good horse, but it had been pushed too far. However, Logan pressed the animal and it did its gallant best.

Winfield, the scout, rode a few yards behind Custer. After him came the Arikari, then Logan. Corporal Shuba was a dozen yards behind Logan. Directly behind him was McCloskey and the other troopers were strung out in the rear.

On the far side of the low valley was another short knoll. Custer disappeared over this when Logan was still a hundred yards behind him. Logan doubted whether his horse could negotiate the knoll, but the animal managed it with some difficulty and Logan drew up for an instant. Below, beside a tiny creek, was a wickiup made of poles. Custer was just dashing up to it.

Beyond the lodge, an Indian was riding swiftly away. Another pony stood near the lodge. Even as Logan looked, Custer pulled up his horse and sprang to the ground, revolver in hand. A gun banged inside the lodge, and Custer thrust out his gun and fired. Only once. Then he stood outside the door of the lodge, gesturing to someone on the inside.

Logan groaned and sent his dead-beat horse down the slope. When he reached the lodge, the two scouts were backing up Custer. Two Indians were just coming out of the lodge, one a tall, fierce-looking warrior, and the other a short, squat man. Inside the hut were a squaw and two half-grown children.

"You're under arrest for murder," Custer was saying, "and you"—indicating the squat Indian—"you're under arrest for resisting arrest."

"Leave him," the tall Indian said. "You take me. I am Rain-in-the-Face, Sioux Chief."

"Sioux cutthroat," snapped Captain Custer. He reached to his horse and took a pair of iron handcuffs from his saddle. He shot a quick look around, saw Logan. "Put these on him." He tossed the cuffs to Logan.

Logan approached Rain-in-the-Face. "Sorry," he said.

"No use handcuff!" exclaimed Rain-in-the-Face, drawing back.

"Put them on," Custer ordered curtly.

Rain-in-the-Face whirled to the squat Sioux and said something in Siouan. The squat man replied in two or three syllables.

Logan reached out with the handcuffs. Rage twisted the face of the Sioux chief as he finally held out his hands. Logan snapped the cuffs over his wrists.

Shuba and a couple of other troopers came up. Custer stepped back. "Tie up this man," he ordered Shuba, indicating the second prisoner.

Shuba took a coil of rope from his saddle horn and proceeded to bind the Indian's hands behind his back. Custer put away his revolver. "I think we might as well camp here. Get something to eat and rest the stock."

"No!" cried Winfield explosively. "We ride."

"Nonsense," declared the captain. "Our horses are worn out."

"You stay if you like," retorted Winfield. "Me and Spotted Turtle, we ride like hell." He gestured upstream. "Where do you think that Indian rode hell for leather? There's a Sioux village up there."

Custer reacted sharply. "How do you know?"

Winfield indicated the prisoners. "They said so. Why do you think Rain-in-the-Face gave up so easy?"

"Because I had the drop on him," replied Custer.

"Oh, hell," snorted Winfield. "He gave up because he didn't want his family to get hurt—not when he knew it'd be only a matter of minutes before he'd be rescued." His eyes went worriedly upstream.

He suddenly spoke to Rain-in-the-Face, in Siouan. The chief looked at him stonily, disdaining to reply. Frowning, Winfield remounted his horse. "This place is no good for a stand."

"He's right, Captain," volunteered Corporal Shuba. "The top of the hill would be better."

Custer looked around the landscape, sizing it up. "There's no cover on the hill."

"Maybe not," said the scout, "but this shack wouldn't stop an arrow, and if they set fire to it we'd roast. I'd rather fight in the open—if we got to fight."

"We'll ride for it," declared Custer. Then he winced. "The horses aren't up to it."

"Uh-uh!"

Custer gestured to the two prisoners. "Put them on horses."

10

The Indians were quickly forced onto mounts and Custer prepared to make the retreat, or flight. But just as he was about to give the signal, a distant yip came down toward the group around the Indian's lodge.

Logan, darting a quick look upstream, saw a clump of Indian ponies appearing over a little ridge.

"To the hill!" roared Custer.

There was a mad scramble away from the Indian lodge. The drooping horses of the troopers were goaded into a last, final effort. The prisoners were herded ahead.

Logan, astride his heaving horse, looked back over his shoulder. A dozen Indians were now streaming down the slope and Indians were still coming.

Custer was the first to reach the near-by hill, picking up two straggling troopers on the way. He wheeled his mount and waited for his men to assemble. Two men came afoot, their horses having foundered. Two more came from the far side of the hill, having until now been unable to make their approach on their wearied horses.

The captain sized up the situation. "We couldn't get a mile on these horses, and we'd be so scattered they'd pick us off one by one. Our only chance is to make a stand here." He hesitated an instant, torn by making the fateful decision. Then he cried, "Dismount!"

The troopers dismounted. All save Corporal Shuba. "Somebody's got to go for help," he bleated. "My horse has some run left in him!"

"Again?" sneered Logan.

Shuba whipped his carbine around. "Don't you sass me, you dirty . . . !"

Custer was beside Logan. He thrust himself between Logan and the corporal. "Dismount, Corporal!"

Shuba would still have taken flight, Logan felt sure, but Custer impatiently seized the bridle rein of the corporal's horse. He kept a firm grip on it and the corporal, white-faced, dismounted.

"Down!" Custer cried. "Here they come!"

And coming they were. The vanguard of the Indians had passed Rain-in-the-Face's lodge down by the stream and were racing their tough, fresh ponies up the easy incline.

It was a ragged charge, but the Indians came, firing. Rifles.

Custer dropped to one knee, in the midst of his prone troopers. "Ready," he said coolly. "Aim . . . *fire!*"

The carbines of the troopers roared and the front of the Indian charge melted away. Three Indians went down, four horses. The Sioux broke, retreating swiftly to assemble again down by the little stream, which was just out of accurate carbine range.

"Hold you fire," Custer ordered. He got to his feet and sized up the battle front. "Not bad," he nodded approval. "They'll think twice before they try that again."

"Oh, they'll come again," said the scout, Winfield. "Them's Ogallala Sioux, the fightenest Injuns in the West."

"Nonsense," said Custer. "They're a cowardly lot, like all Indians." He smiled grimly. "They said Black Kettle was unbeatable, but the general taught him a lesson six years ago. And he'll teach these Sioux the same kind of lesson."

Logan, looking at the captain, shook his head. Before the engagement Custer had been a martinet, a confused, bungling officer. But now, now that hostilities had opened, he was a changed man. He was a Custer, cool, calm, utterly fearless.

Custer's eyes fell to Rain-in-the-Face, who had been forced to the ground by the troopers. The Indian's face bore an expression of unmistakable hatred and fury.

"You Longhair brother?" Rain-in-the-Face asked.

"That's right," Custer replied easily.

The Sioux spat at Custer. Some of the spittle plastered Custer's boot. The captain looked down at it coolly. "You'll pay for that."

"I'll bet he will, too," McCloskey whispered to Logan.

A sudden chill slithered up Logan's spine. "Where's the Baron?"

"Huh?" McCloskey shot a quick look around. "Be damned. He didn't make it here. Last I saw his horse was about ready to go down."

Logan scrambled to his feet, searched the valley to the east. Von Brandenburg was out of sight.

He turned to the captain. "We're missing one man."

"Eh?" Custer made a quick count. "That's right. Who is he?"

Shuba had already determined that. "Von Brandenburg. A pigheaded Dutchman. I always thought he was a coward."

"Speak for yourself," Logan said bluntly.

Custer's smoldering eyes came to rest on Logan. "Look here, soldier, what's your name?"

"Logan, sir. Private Logan."

Custer nodded. "That's right. I asked you before. I'll remember it this time. I can't say that I like your attitude——"

"The most insubordinate man in the troop, sir!" quickly offered Shuba.

"I'm inclined to agree with you," Custer said thoughtfully. "Make a note of it, Corporal."

"I have already. I was figuring to report him to my own commanding officer."

"I'll speak to him myself," said Custer.

"If you get out of here alive," suddenly snarled Winfield. "Get set!"

Custer whirled. Down below the Indians had assembled. Their numbers had increased somewhat, so that there were more than a score of them, in spite of their losses in the first attack. They were spread out now, on a wide front.

"Down!" ordered Custer. "Make every shot count."

The Inians below sent up a furious yipping and yelling as they began their assault. The horses came at a run, but not at a wild charge. The Indians held them under control, ready to send them to the right, to the left, or to whirl them if that became necessary. And the warriors themselves rode low, partly concealed by the horses' bodies. A few of the Indians clung to their horses' manes and kept their bodies down low on the right or left side of their horses, so that the only target they gave the troopers was a hand or a foot. They rode their horses obliquely up the hill, sheltering their bodies on the far side.

This was typical Indian warfare, and to the veteran soldiers who had fought Indians before it was old stuff. The Indian was a difficult target if the troopers were also mounted. But the soldiers were down on the ground, had plenty of time to aim. It would not be until it was hand to hand, until the Indians burst among the soldiers that the fight would become one-sided.

The thing to do was to get as many Indians as possible before they burst upon the top of the ridge.

Custer, on one knee, his carbine held ready, cried out, "Aim for their horses!"

Logan, who had a bead drawn on a portion of Indian anatomy, shifted his aim. He held it on a pony, oblivious to everything else.

"Fire!" roared Custer, discharging his own carbine at the same time.

Every trooper on the summit blasted away and seven Indian ponies went down. The Indians, as if by a signal, threw caution to the winds. They roared up the slope, firing and yelling furiously. There was no time to reload the carbines. The soldiers dropped them, grabbed up their revolvers and fired them into the Indians and their ponies. Horses went down, throwing Indians. Other warriors jumped clear and came charging forward on foot.

Bullets began to whine around the soldiers. A man cried out, another close beside Logan dropped his revolver and, falling backward, began to sob in anguish.

Logan thrust his revolver into the face of an Indian coming at him headlong. He pulled the trigger and the man's face spurted blood on Logan as the Indian came to a halt at Logan's feet, dead.

The deadly fire of the soldiers was too much for the Indians. One or two actually reached the troopers, but were quickly cut down. The Indians dispersed in all directions, and one or two were cut down even as they fled.

"Cease firing!" cried Custer.

He sprang to his feet, saw a soldier lying on his face and strode to him. He stooped over him. "He's dead!"

Corporal Shuba called out, "Captain Custer . . . !"

Custer whirled, saw Shuba standing over two prone Indians. He went quickly to them.

"They tried to run for it during the attack," Shuba said.

"You haven't killed them?" cried Custer.

"I dunno," replied Shuba. "They sure tried to kill *me.*"

Custer turned over one Indian with his foot. It was Rain-in-the-Face. Blood was streaming down the chief's face from a bad cut over his forehead, but his eyes were open.

"I had to slug him," Shuba said defensively.

"Good," exclaimed the captain. He turned over the second Indian.

"Him I had to shoot," Shuba said.

"Couldn't be helped. Here, we'll make sure he doesn't try a break again." He nudged Rain-in-the-Face's stomach with his toe. "Tie his feet."

While Shuba got a rope and began to tie the chief's ankles together, Custer went around his men. McCloskey's face had been cut by a grazing bullet. He stopped there. "You'll live, soldier," he said.

He stopped by Logan, who was kneeling beside a fallen soldier. "What's the matter with him?"

"Dead, sir!"

Custer frowned. "That's two." He looked around, found two men wounded, one rather seriously. "Two dead, three

wounded," he observed. "That's not so bad." He looked down the hillside. "We got at least six of them and"—he counted —"nine, ten, eleven horses."

"How many horses *we* got?" asked Winfield bluntly.

Custer shot a quick look around. "They're gone!"

"Didn't think they'd stay here with all that shooting, did you?"

Custer winced visibly. "This is going to make our retreat difficult."

"What retreat?"

Winfield pointed out across the valley, past the lodge of Rain-in-the-Face, down by the creek. A score of Indians were pouring down the distant slope to join the Indians by the creek.

Custer groaned. "Where do they keep coming from?"

"I told you there was a village over in the other valley."

"How big is it?"

Winfield shrugged. "Forty, fifty lodges."

"That could be two hundred warriors. We can't fight that many."

"That's what I been trying to tell you, Captain," Winfield said. "We haven't got a chance. Unless . . ."

"Unless what?"

Winfield nodded toward Rain-in-the-Face. "We got their chief. Maybe we could make a deal."

Custer looked at the Indian chief. Then he shook his head. "I was sent to get him, and I'll make no deal that means giving him up."

"All right," said the scout, "it's no deal."

Corporal Shuba approached Captain Custer. "I think you're making a mistake, Captain Custer."

Custer regarded the corporal coldly. "Oh, am I?"

"Our lives are worth more than an Indian's."

"Do you think I'd face my brother emptyhanded?" demanded Custer.

"You'll never see the general again, if you don't make the deal!"

Custer's mouth tightened. "As long as I'm in command here, there'll be no deals made with the enemy."

Corporal Shuba hesitated, his face dark with anger, then he saluted Custer and walked off to the other side of the group, to be as far from him as possible.

Custer turned to watch the Indians. The reinforcements had reached the group down below, and they were in some sort of powwow. This broke up after a while, and a dozen Indians mounted on ponies began to circle off to the left, climbing the ridge.

Custer watched them dourly. "They're coming round to this side. That means they're going to attack from both sides."

There was no immediate attack, however. The Indians having climbed the ridge and descended on the eastern side, spread out in a semicircular line, covering the front as well as the flanks of the defenders of the hilltop.

By that time the Indians on the creek side had also spread out in a semicircle, covering the west front and flanks. Custer and his troopers were completely surrounded. The Indians were just out of effective rifle-shot range.

The soldiers settled down, gathering in knots of two and three. McCloskey came over beside Logan.

"What do you make of the baron?"

"His horse gave out."

"You don't buy what your friend the corporal said?"

"No. I'd bet on Von Brandenburg."

"So would I," said McCloskey. He pointed to the east. "You think he's laying low out there?"

"I've been thinking about that. If his horse recovered, I have an idea that the baron's on his way back to the Fort."

"For help?" McCloskey nodded. "I've been consoling myself with that thought. If anybody can get through, the baron can."

Logan looked past McCloskey, to where Shuba was crouched, talking earnestly to two of the troopers. "Shuba's cooking up something."

McCloskey spat in disgust. "Two good men dead and he's still alive. Why couldn't he have been one of them who stopped a bullet?"

"Why don't you go over and find out what he's hatching up?"

"I don't want any part of his schemes."

"He won't talk to me," Logan said.

"He doesn't care for me either."

"He still might talk, though. He won't if I move over."

McCloskey hesitated, then nodded. He moved away from Logan for a minute or two, sitting on the ground, looking down toward the Indians. Then he finally moved over to Shuba's group.

Logan could hear Shuba exclaiming angrily as McCloskey came up, but the Irishman was popular with the other troopers and there was a heated argument for a moment. Then Shuba leaned forward and began talking quickly in low tones.

One of the troopers left the group and moved to the side of another man. He talked to him and the new man got up and joined Shuba's group. Shuba began talking again.

McCloskey left the group and went to a soldier, who moved over to join Shuba's group. McCloskey remained apart from Logan for ten minutes or so, then finally eased over to him. By that time Shuba was talking to the scout, Winfield.

"He wants to take over," McCloskey said abruptly. He pointed down toward the Indians, said loudly, "They figure on starving us out, I guess." Then he said, in a low tone, "He wants to make a deal with the Indians."

"What do the boys think?"

McCloskey said loudly, "They only outnumber us about four to one. How big odds do they want?" Then dropping his voice, "They don't think we can last until tomorrow. But they don't like the idea of killing an officer."

"Shuba's planning to kill Custer?" Logan asked, surprised.

"What else? He won't surrender, that's for sure."

"How soon before he'll make the move?"

"I dunno yet. The boys are balking. It's my hunch they'll go along with him, though. . . ." He sent a quick look toward Shuba. "I better move away from you." He hesitated. "You know what chance you'll have if Shuba takes over?"

McCloskey moved away from Logan and sprawled out on his stomach to watch the Indians down by Rain-in-the-Face's lodge.

Logan sat on the hill, his knees hunched up, so that his chin almost rested on them. They were, he estimated, between forty and fifty miles from Fort Lincoln. It would take a strong man more than twenty-four hours of forced walking to reach the Fort and then a cavalry troop would require another twelve hours to come to the relief of Captain Custer's detachment. Thirty-six hours . . . late the following day.

Logan shook his head. The Indians would creep up in the darkness. They did not like to fight at night, but they would if they had to. The besieged were small in numbers, yet in daylight they could inflict greater casualties than the Indians were prepared to take. A sneak attack at night, or sniping at men who had no shelter. . . .

Logan got to his feet. Deliberately he strolled over to where Shuba was in a huddle with two troopers. The corporal scowled up at him. "What do *you* want?"

"You're a sneaking coward, Shuba," Logan said savagely.

Shuba cried out in astonishment and rage. His hand went for his carbine. Logan kicked him in the face and the corporal went over backwards.

Logan was aware that Captain Custer yelled out, but he kept his attention on Shuba. The corporal scrambled over,

lunging for his revolver, which lay on the ground, but one of the soldiers scooped it away. Shuba got to his feet.

"I'll kill you for that," he screamed. He threw himself at Logan. The latter took a hard fist on the side of the head, then stepped in and smashed Shuba with a terrific blow. The corporal went down, stunned.

Custer reached Logan then. He grabbed his shoulders and whirled him around. "You're under arrest, Trooper!"

"There's the man you should arrest, Captain," Logan said coolly. "I just saved your life."

"What's that?"

"He was going to kill you so he could trade Rain-in-the-Face for his own life."

"That's a lie!" roared Shuba hoarsely.

"Is it?" Logan stabbed a finger at one of the soldiers who had gathered around. "Is it?"

The soldier glowered, but made no reply.

Custer made an angry gesture to the soldier. "Speak up, man!"

"I don't know what he's talkin' about," replied the trooper sullenly.

"Logan's the liar," cried Shuba, getting to his feet. "He's had it in for me. He thinks I been riding him. You saw him —you saw him hit me, sir."

"I saw him," said Custer grimly. "I'm going to get to the bottom of this. Corporal, were you planning to make a deal with the Indians?"

"No, sir, not me, sir. Why, I wouldn't think of such a thing!"

Custer turned angrily to McCloskey. "You, soldier, talk up."

McCloskey was on a spot. Talking to Logan was one thing, but Custer was an officer. An enlisted man never squealed on another enlisted man—not to an officer. Yet Logan was in difficulty. McCloskey solved the quandary by remaining silent.

Custer knew the brotherhood of soldiers. He had no expectations of making one of them talk, now that the pattern had been set; but he pointed at a man beside McCloskey. "You, soldier, was the corporal plotting to trade with the Indians?"

The trooper followed McCloskey's example. He remained silent. And by his silence, Custer guessed that Logan had told the truth. He made an angry gesture of dismissal. "I guess you men haven't got enough to keep you busy. Well, it looks like we're going to be here for a spell. So we'll dig in."

"Dig, sir?" asked McCloskey politely. "With what, sir?"

"With knives, your hands if you've nothing else. We're going to need all the protection we can get, after it gets dark." He squinted at the sun. "That's about three hours from now." He walked off a few yards. "We'll dig in here. And I'll be listening to every word that's spoken from now on."

The men assembled sullenly. Shuba made one last attempt. "What about him, sir?" He pointed to Logan. "He struck a noncommissioned officer."

"You can keep guard over him, if you like," Custer replied sarcastically.

Shuba held out his hand to Logan. "Give me your revolver, Trooper."

"Oh, hell!" swore Custer. "That's carrying it too far. None of us may be alive by morning. Keep your weapons, Logan."

"Thank you, sir."

The men got down on their knees and began scraping at the earth. It was hard, mostly decomposed rock with only an inch or two of soil covering. The men scratched and scraped, cursing softly as they worked.

Shuba, taking upon himself the prerogative of rank, stood to one side while the others worked. McCloskey finally whirled on him. "You can dig your own hole, Corporal!"

"I'll remember that, McCloskey," snarled Shuba.

"Stop that," Custer ordered. "You're no better than the rest, Corporal. Dig!"

Thus ordered, Shuba got down on his knees. But Custer retained his own prerogatives. He stood over the soldiers.

Knife blades broke on the rocky soil and hands were soon bleeding, but the soldiers persevered and by nightfall had dug a pit a dozen feet wide and almost two feet deep, with a parapet a foot or so all around. By that time Custer's command numbered nine, the seriously wounded man having died.

11

Captain Custer crawled among the soldiers in the pit. "Here," he said, clapping a man who had dozed off, "we can't afford to sleep. The Indians have moved up closer and if they make a sudden rush, they'll overwhelm us. Stay awake ——" He broke off as something swished past his head. Custer dropped flat to the ground. Behind him there was a choking gurgle.

"Arrows," said Custer softly. "Give them a round!"

The troopers poured out a sudden fire, shooting wildly in the dark.

"Hold it!"

Custer squirmed around. "Who was it?"

"Winfield," a soldier replied quietly.

"You'd think *he'd* have had sense enough to keep down," exclaimed Custer. "Is he dead?"

"He'll never be deader."

"That leaves eight of us."

The arrows came again. Whenever a man raised his head an instant above the parapet, an arrow followed swiftly. Fortunately no one was hit after Winfield's death.

The moon came out about ten o'clock, and Custer risked a quick look over the parapet. "I think they've moved back," he said. He thrust his revolver over the breastworks and fired two quick shots. "Just to let them know we're alert."

An arrow thudded into the earth on the other side of the rampart. "They're alert, too," Custer added.

It was a long night. None of the soldiers had eaten a mouthful of food since the previous morning. A few had canteens, however, so there was as yet no thirst to contend with. That would come later, during the second day . . . if the Indians did not try a dawn rush.

The first faint light in the sky in the east roused Custer from a reverie that had kept him motionless for the past hour. He drew a deep breath and again began to move among the men. "See that your rifles and revolvers are loaded," he cautioned in a low tone.

There was a clicking around him as the men examined their weapons and cocked the carbines. The troopers were alert, ready.

"They're damn quiet out there," said Custer, after listening for a moment. He raised his head over the eastern side of the breastworks. "I hear horses," he said, dropping down.

The Arikara said something in his tongue, but with Winfield, the translator, dead, no one could understand him. The Arikara tugged at Custer's sleeve, spoke quickly, gutturally and pointed.

"Sure, sure," said Custer. "They're going to charge."

Logan crawled over a man and peered over the parapet. The sky was lightening, but on the ground it was still black as the inside of a canteen, the moon having disappeared about an hour ago.

He listened, then turned. "Those horses are far away, Captain," he said.

Custer groaned. "More reinforcements for the devils."

"I don't think so," said Logan.

Custer moved over beside Logan. He peered intently into the darkness, then drew his revolver and fired it into the sky. He cocked his head to one side.

From the far distance came the report of a gun. And then—the sweetest sound on earth—a bugle!

"Cavalry!" cried Custer.

A shout went up among the soldiers. "We're saved. The Seventh's coming!"

A man sprang up. In the darkness a bow twanged and an arrow thudded into the soldier. "Down!" cried Custer.

There was a rush of feet down the slope. The Indians, too, had heard the distant shooting, the bugle. They came forward now, in a last desperate rush to annihilate the soldiers whom they had besieged for more than twenty hours.

The troopers, however, were ready. Their guns were loaded and rescue was near.

They poured a reckless, savage fire into the moving shadows that swarmed forward. They emptied their carbines, dropped them and fired their revolvers.

An Indian leaped across the breastworks and was clubbed to death with revolver barrels. A second man hurdled the parapet and was blasted to death. A third came over, from the western side. He fell inside the pit, but came to his feet, a knife in his hands. A soldier cried out as the knife was plunged into his vitals, but he gripped the savage even as he fell and sent a bullet tearing into the Indian.

The charge was short and savage. It rolled back, leaving four Indians dead inside the pit, two more just outside. The rising dawn found the defenders in clear possession of the hilltop—six live men, of whom three were wounded.

The soldiers could be seen now, a mile away. The Indians were in full retreat to the west.

Captain Tom Custer's little command poured out of the pit in which they had lain all night. They cheered the oncoming soldiers.

The rescuers were Troop C, Commanding Officer, Captain Dykes. Von Brandenburg was with the troop. He clapped Logan and McCloskey on the shoulders.

"I was a half mile from here," he said, "when you made your first stand. My horse was almost dead, but he carried me two or three miles, when I picked up another horse that had some run left in him. But even so, I was lucky. I ran into a patrol less than twenty miles from here. A couple of

the boys went back to the fort and brought the relief column." He shook his head. "I never thought we'd make it here in time."

"Corporal Shuba said you ran out on us yesterday," declared McCloskey.

"*Ach,* dot corporal," exclaimed Von Brandenburg. "I punch him in the nose."

"Logan did that last night," McCloskey said. "And I've got a hunch it's going to cost him a lot of trouble."

"Beginning now," muttered Logan, as he watched Shuba talking earnestly to First Sergeant Otis. "Oh-oh, here it comes!"

The First Sergeant left Shuba and came toward Logan. He gestured him to step to one side. Logan left the baron and McCloskey.

"I've just had a serious complaint about you, Logan," Sergeant Otis began. "I know that Corporal Shuba had been riding you. We talked about it back at the fort, but this——"

"Yes," said Logan, "I hit him. But it wasn't because he was riding me. I can take that."

"In the Army," Otis said severely, "there's *no* excuse for striking a noncommissioned officer. You ought to know that. You admit, then, you struck him?"

"I hit him," Logan said evenly, "to keep him from murdering Captain Custer and surrendering Chief Rain-in-the-Face to the Sioux. I don't think one of us would be alive right now if I hadn't stopped Shuba."

Sergeant Otis shook his head. "Shuba doesn't say anything about that and frankly I find it hard to believe."

"Ask Captain Custer!"

"I can't do that." The first sergeant hesitated. "All I can do is talk to Captain Dykes."

"Go ahead."

"I can't, right now. He's busy with Captain Custer."

The officers talked for another moment or two, then the order to mount was given. The Indians were gone, but there was no telling whether they would return . . . with reinforcements. It was a good twelve hours back to the Fort, probably more, since the rescued soldiers—as well as the prisoner—would have to ride double with the rescuers.

There was no Indian pursuit. Technically, the Sioux were at peace. Attacking a small, isolated party of soldiers was one thing, but to attack a full troop of the Seventh was quite a different proposition. General Custer would make complete retaliation, which would lead to a full-scale Indian war. The leaders of the Sioux were not prepared for that.

The ride to Fort Lincoln was made in good order, the troop reaching the post late in the evening after a good march.

After a hearty meal, which the mess sergeant and cook had ready, the men went to their squad rooms.

12

Captain Dykes had made his report with great care. He had given due credit to the gallant stand of Captain Custer against superior forces. The report, he felt sure, would read well even in Washington.

Then why had the general sent for him so peremptorily?

He entered Headquarters and found Lieutenant Dressen seated on a bench. They exchanged casual salutes, then Dressen nodded to the closed door of the general's office.

"You step on Captain Tom's toes?" Dressen asked sardonically.

"Of course not," retorted Captain Dykes irritably. "Any reason I should have?"

"No-no, I was just passing a remark. You pulled him out of a pretty deep hole and I was wondering——"

"Don't wonder, Lieutenant."

Although he was seated, Dressen came to mock attention. "Very good, sir!"

Captain Dykes's face reddened from anger. He was about to cut Dressen down to size, when a voice inside the office roared out, "Orderly!"

The orderly got up quickly from his desk and went to the general's office. "Yes, sir!" he said into the room.

The general's voice came out, "I sent for Captain Dykes twenty minutes ago. Why isn't he here?"

"He is, sir," replied the orderly. "I was waiting to announce him when you were free."

"Send him in!"

Dykes was already moving to the door. He passed the orderly and entered the general's office. Captain Tom Custer was seated near the general's desk.

"A very good report, Captain," General Custer said, nodding approval. "I've sent it on to Washington. They'll have time to digest it before I get there."

"You're going to Washington, sir?" Dykes asked politely.

"Same old stuff. They've got me running back and forth."

Custer cleared his throat. "As a matter of fact, I'm to testify before a board. Yes, again." He smiled thinly. "Read the papers, Captain. I'm going to let them have it straight from the shoulder."

"We'll be pulling for you," Captain Tom said enthusiastically.

Custer made an easy gesture. "I may be in Washington for some weeks, Captain. Major Reno will be in command here, so I thought this would be as good a time as any to make the changes I've been thinking about. Subject to the colonel's approval, of course."

Custer was referring to Colonel Smith, the nominal commander of the Seventh Cavalry, who had been on detached duty in Washington for the past eight years, leaving his lieutenant colonel, George Armstrong Custer, in actual command of the Seventh.

Custer continued, "The regiment's been below strength for a year or more. I've been assured that recruiting has been resumed throughout the country and that the Seventh will receive its full complement of recruits. You know what that means."

"Why—ah—not quite, sir," said Captain Dykes.

"The staff," Custer explained. "More paper work. Too much for me. Major Reno will become the executive officer, which leaves his battalion without a commanding officer." Custer leaned back and smiled indulgently, to enjoy the full flavor of the boon he was about to bestow. "Your majority, Captain!"

Dykes could not restrain a great sigh of relief—and thanks. "Thank you, General!"

"Colonel," corrected Custer. "You've waited a long time, Major. A long time. Haven't we all? How soon can you leave your troop?"

"Why, immediately."

"Good. I like a quick decision, Major. Now, what about your lieutenants?"

"Lieutenant Boyce and Lieutenant Harter. Competent men, both of them."

Custer frowned. "Boyce is a ranker, I believe."

"Yes, sir."

"He was a fine noncom, as I recall. Let's see, his commission came through only three years ago. Just before Harter graduated from the Point?"

"Why, no, General. Harter is only a year and a half out of West Point."

"Is that all? Mmm, I'm afraid he'll need some seasoning, then."

"He's pretty young, but I believe he'll make a good officer."

"I'm sure of it. Well, I'm afraid it'll have to be Dressen, then. He's got the seniority."

"You're giving him C Troop, sir?"

"He's been with the Seventh eight years. Good for troop morale. A soldier who came up through the ranks. You don't like Dressen?"

"No, sir," Dykes said quickly. "I mean, I didn't say that, sir."

"Of course not. I understand, Major." Custer rose and extended his hand to Dykes. "Congratulations, Major. And on your way out, ask Dressen to step in."

"I'll be going, too," Captain Tom said, getting up.

The two men left and Dressen entered. He came to attention and saluted briskly.

"At ease, Lieutenant," Custer said. "I've been going over your service record, Lieutenant. You've been with the regiment almost as long as I have."

"Yes, General," Dressen said stiffly.

"Relax, man," said Custer calmly. "That's one thing they teach you at the Point. Just because a man's only a lieutenant doesn't mean he's got to be afraid of his superiors every minute. Rank comes with service. All generals were lieutenants once." He coughed. "Never mind. I'll give it to you quickly. You're getting your extra bar, Dressen."

"I—I'm being promoted?" faltered Dressen.

"That's what I said. I'm assigning you to the command of C Troop. Captain Dykes is moving up and you're replacing him. I hope you'll make as good a captain as Dykes was."

"Oh, I will, sir," cried Dressen fervently. "I—I'll do my very best."

"I'm sure you will . . . Captain." Custer saluted Dressen casually, a signal that he was dismissed, and when Dressen left, a frown of distaste crossed Custer's face.

The newly promoted Captain Dressen went from Headquarters to his quarters where he elatedly broke the news to Harriet. The latter, instead of shouting in delight, broke down and cried, and Dressen left her wiping the tears from her eyes.

He crossed the parade ground to the orderly room of Troop C, where he learned that Major Dykes had already checked out.

Dressen seated himself at the captain's desk and looked up at First Sergeant Otis. "You've probably heard that I'm an old enlisted man myself," he said to the sergeant.

"Yes, sir, I believe I've heard it."

"We'll get along, Sergeant, we'll get along. Just remember that, though, will you? What I mean, I know gold-bricking better than any West Pointer." He smiled thinly. "I've done my share of it, in my time."

"Yes, sir," agreed Sergeant Otis.

"We'll get along, I'm sure. Now, let me have the roster of the men."

Sergeant Otis already had it in his hand. "Here it is, sir."

"Good. I believe you lost some men on that expedition with Captain Tom."

"Four men, sir, and three in the hospital."

"I'll put in a requisition for replacements. Mmm, this Corporal Shuba here. He was the corporal in charge under Captain Tom, was he not?"

"Yes, sir, and I'd like to talk to you about him."

"Good. Captain Tom gave me a fine report on him . . ." He looked sharply at the first sergeant. "He's a good soldier, isn't he?"

"He's had considerable service. But, well, sir, I—I feel it is my duty to tell you that the corporal has been having a bit of a feud with one of the men."

"A feud?"

"The truth of the matter is that he's been riding one of the men. I've been aware of it for some time and while they were both on this patrol they—they had a fight."

"A private had a fight with a corporal?"

"Corporal Shuba claims that the trooper assaulted him. He's made a report of it and—well, Captain Dykes didn't get time to go into it."

"What's there to go into? A private struck an officer. It's very simple. Have the man taken to the guardhouse and make out the charges."

"I don't believe it's as simple as that, sir."

"Did you see the fight, Sergeant?"

"No, sir, I wasn't on the patrol. But I talked to the man——"

"You talked to the private? What about the corporal?"

"I talked to him, too. But you see——"

"I'm afraid I don't see, Sergeant. I just got through telling you that I've come up through the ranks. I've been a private and a corporal. And a sergeant. During the war, I knew a private who struck an officer. He was shot. I realize we're not at war now, but striking a superior is a serious offense. You've been in the Army long enough to know that."

"Yes, sir," said Sergeant Otis stiffly.

"I'll get to the bottom of this at once. Fetch Corporal Shuba!"

13

Von Brandenburg broke the news to Logan. He came out to the latrines where Logan was working.

"It's happened, Tom," he said, choking with excitement. "I hate to tell you, but I—I thought I'd better be the one to break it to you. It's happened. . . ."

"What's happened, Baron?" Logan asked calmly.

"The worst. Your enemy, Lieutenant Dressen—he——" Von Brandenburg swallowed hard, then burst out, "He's been made captain of Troop C!"

Logan's hand tightened about the broom so hard that his knuckles showed white. "Say that again, Baron! Dressen's captain of *this* troop?"

Von Brandenburg nodded. "What are you going to do?"

"I don't know, Baron," Logan said slowly. "I don't know." He tossed the broom aside. "Shuba *and* Dressen! If the two ever got together . . ."

He did not know that Corporal Shuba was at that moment in the orderly room with Captain Dressen.

A half hour later, Sergeant Cotter came looking for Logan. "You're wanted in the orderly room, Private." He looked admiringly around the labtrine. "A fine job, Private, a fine job. Maybe the new skipper's going to give you the job permanent."

"Maybe," said Logan, "and maybe he's going to make me a sergeant and give *you* the job."

"Ha ha," laughed Sergeant Cotter without humor.

Logan entered the orderly room and Sergeant Otis, who sat at his desk, shook his head glumly. "The new skipper wants to talk to you. Go in."

Logan entered the captain's office. Dressen had finished with Shuba and was alone. He smiled thinly at Logan. "Don't you know enough to change from your denims before you appear before your commanding officer?"

"I thought I'd save time," Logan replied. "I'll be wearing these in the guardhouse, won't I? Or do you figure on playing the cat and mouse game awhile?"

"I haven't made up my mind yet," said Dressen, "about throwing you in the guardhouse. There's a serious complaint against you, by Sergeant Shuba——"

"Sergeant Shuba?"

"A very good man. I'm promoting him. The sergeant claims you attacked him, out on patrol."

"Sergeant Shuba," Logan said deliberately, "is a coward. Like you, Dressen!"

The captain's eyes glinted dangerously. "This is the last time I'll talk to you privately, Logan. Any remarks you make to me hereafter will be before witnesses—and you'll take the consequences."

'Yes, Captain!" said Logan. "Is that all—sir?"

Dressen made a gesture of dismissal. Logan saluted him smartly, about-faced and walked out of the room. In the outer office Sergeant Otis looked at him inquiringly, but Logan continued on out.

Captain Dressen entered his apartment and found Alice Wilder writing letters at the little desk in the corner.

"Congratulations, Captain!" she said, over her shoulder.

Dressen sent a quick look toward the kitchen. "Where's Harriet?"

"She went over to call on Mrs. Coveney," Alice replied.

"How long has she been gone?"

"Just a few minutes, but she said she'd only stay a half hour."

Dressen crossed the room to stand over Alice. "Who're you writing to?"

"Mother, right now."

"Not that friend of yours? What's-his-name, the bookkeeper or whatever he is."

Alice turned, a spot of color on her cheeks. "I've already written to him."

Dressen pounded his right fist into the palm of his left hand. He was in a nervous, intense state and Alice wished that her sister would come home.

He said, "I've waited a long time for this promotion. Things are going to be different. For the first time there'll be a little money . . ."

"Harriet hasn't complained about money," Alice said.

"Harriet!" exclaimed Dressen. He looked intently at the back of Alice's head. "It's been nice having you here. I'm glad you decided to stay."

"I haven't decided," Alice said quickly. She indicated the letters. "I'm telling Mother right now that I'll be home next week."

"No!" exclaimed Dressen. "You—you've got to stay."

"I've been here too long already."

"Harriet needs you. She's lonesome without you."

"She knows I'm leaving. She doesn't mind."

"But *I* mind," cried Dressen. His hand fell on Alice's shoulder and gripped it hard. "I want you to stay."

"You're hurting me," cried Alice, wincing.

Instead of releasing her, Dressen only gripped harder. He reached down with his free hand and caught Alice's arm. He pulled her to her feet. Alice cried out and Dressen suddenly stiffened, but did not let go of her.

"Jim, you're forgetting yourself," cried Alice in panic.

Dressen slowly released his grip on her and Alice stepped back.

"I guess you know, now," Dressen said slowly. He passed a hand over his face as if to wipe away a haze.

"I'm sorry," Alice said. "This is all the more reason for me to go home."

"Maybe," Dressen said, "maybe it's just as well. I didn't want this to happen."

"Let's forget it happened."

"Sure," said Dressen, "that's easy for you. You've got this bookkeeper friend at home. You'll get married to him."

"I won't."

A strange light came into Dressen's eyes. "You mean because of——"

Alice saw that she had made a mistake and tried to correct it quickly. "No-no, Jim. I'm sorry if I gave you the wrong impression. It's not because—of *you*."

Dressen took a step toward her again, but in a panic Alice slipped away from him and crossed the room. "Please—you mustn't."

"Who is it?" Dressen asked hoarsely. "You said it isn't that fellow back home, then . . ." He stopped and his nostrils flared. "Don't tell me you've fallen for Tom Logan!"

"No!" cried Alice, but she put too much emphasis in the denial.

Dressen shook his head. "Well, I'm a Comanche! Tom Logan." He laughed crookedly. "Have you heard *all* of the news? I'm the new commanding officer of—yes, C Troop. I'm Tom Logan's captain!"

Alice had not known. Dressen had merely told his wife that he'd been promoted to captain, and that was the information that Harriet had passed on to her sister. Horror now swept across Alice's face.

"What are you—going to do—to him?"

"Logan?" Dressen began to chuckle as the ironic humor of it registered fully. "Yes, the great hero, who saved your life —who told you a lot of lies about me. . . ."

"Were they lies, Jim?" Alice flashed at him.

"Lies," continued Dressen. "The big brave man, the big fat liar—he's under me. I've got power of life and death over him. I can make him wish he'd never been born—and I will, damn his soul!—I will!"

"No, you mustn't," breathed Alice. "He—he can't take it."

"He'll take it," snapped Dressen. "He'll take everything I'll hand out to him. I'm his commanding officer. He'll do what I tell him to do, or I'll throw him in the guardhouse. I'll keep him there the rest of his life. The dirty swine; I've got him now where I want him."

"You're mad, Jim!"

"He came here to hound me," Dressen went on. "He'll regret that. I'll give him every dirty detail and if he whines . . ." He suddenly stopped. "Tom Logan—you're in love with him!"

"I didn't say that."

"Say it then."

"I won't!"

The front door suddenly opened and Harriet Dressen entered. She stopped and looked from her sister to her husband. "Have you two been quar . . . ?"

"No!" snapped Dressen. "I just stopped by for a moment to get something." He nodded abruptly to his wife and walked past her, through the door.

Harriet's eyes followed him until the door closed, then she turned to face Alice, who had seized the opportunity to compose herself while her sister was looking away from her.

"You *were* quarreling," Harriet said.

"No, dear," protested Alice. "I mean, we weren't exactly quarreling. It's just—well, Jim's been assigned to Troop C—Tom Logan's troop."

Harriet crossed to the kitchen door and stood in the open doorway a moment, her back to Alice. She said quietly, "It means trouble for Logan." She made a small gesture without turning. "I know, Alice."

"What?"

"Tom Logan and—and you."

She turned and looked steadily at Alice. "It's true, isn't it, dear?"

Alice sighed heavily. "I don't know, Harriet. I—I can't take my mind off him. I owe him my life, that's true, but it isn't just that. If I hadn't met him again here at the Fort, I would have forgotten him by now. Seeing him——"

"I was afraid of that, Alice." Harriet attempted a wan smile. "Jim hates him. He hates him so much that I—I have

been wondering whether there isn't some truth to what Logan says about him and Jim. All these years I . . ." Her words trailed off.

Alice stepped up to Harriet. "You mean Jim hasn't been telling the—the truth?"

"All I know about Jim, actually, is what he's told me. I—I've caught him in lies—little things that didn't seem important by themselves, but they've remained with me until I don't know what to believe any more. Things have not been going too well with us; I'm sure you know that by now. That's one of the reasons I was so glad to have you here, why I want you to stay."

"I can't stay, dear. I've got to go."

"You can't go, Alice. I need you."

Worriedly, Alice said, "I think it's best that I go."

"Why? Why should you go? You said yourself that Tom—I mean, he's here and he's going to remain here for some time. Why shouldn't you stay?"

"It's hopeless, Harriet. You know it is. He's an enlisted man, with almost five years to go in the service and—and with Jim Dressen his commander. The situation's impossible. Think of it. You'll understand."

14

Sergeant Shuba, the new stripes on his sleeve, entered the squad room and looked around. "Got a little job for three gold-brickers," he announced pleasantly. "The volunteers will get it naturally, but don't crowd, boys; I only need three men."

The soldiers in the squad room kept their eyes away from the sergeant's, and Shuba roamed over toward McCloskey's bunk. "You busy, Irish?"

"My carbine barrel's pitted," retorted McCloskey. "It'll take me a good hour to clean it."

"You couldn't put it off until this evening?"

"No!"

"Good. Now, just two more volunteers. How about you, Dutch?"

Von Brandenburg grunted. "Vy not?"

"Oh, splendid. I'll remember this." Shuba finally fixed his eyes on Logan. "How about the hero of Chickamauga? Got time for a little touch of work?"

"I've always got time, Sergeant," Logan said calmly.

"I knew I could count on you. Now, if you three fine soldiers will go and draw three shovels and—ah—three picks and meet me out in front in say, about sixty seconds . . ."

The three men got the picks and shovels from the supply room and, joining Sergeant Shuba in front of the barracks, marched with him to the sutler's store. Shuba took hold of the hitchrail, gave it a mighty wrench.

"D'you see, fellows? It shakes. Now, what I want you to do is dig out the posts, fill up the holes and dig new ones and see that some rock is put on the bottom of the holes so that the posts will have a solid footing. I'll inspect the job when you're finished and I don't want to be able to wiggle the rail. Understand? I want it tight. Real snug and tight."

He walked off and McCloskey tried to drive his shovel into the hard earth. He groaned. "You're a tough friend to have, Logan."

"I know," Logan replied. "I think you and the baron had better become my enemies."

"Dot verdammte Shuba," swore Von Brandenburg. "He push me too far one time." He looked at Logan. "With our new captain, we are going to have a hard winter."

"I know," said Logan. "And I don't think it's fair that you two take what's coming to me."

"I can take anything that damn Shuba can dish out," snapped McCloskey angrily.

"It isn't just Shuba," Logan said. He hesitated. "You don't know about the captain——"

"Dressen?"

"He hates me worse than Shuba does."

"But you never even met the man."

"Oh, yes, I did. I met him—during the war."

"He still remembers you?"

"He'll remember me as long as he lives."

"I don't get it." McCloskey looked at Von Brandenburg. "You knew about this, Baron?"

"I know the captain is Tom's enemy, yes. I don't know why."

"What'd he do to you, or you to him?" McCloskey asked bluntly.

Logan shook his head. "I can't tell you."

"It's serious enough that you'd desert?"

Logan hesitated. "It's more serious than that. That's all I can tell, and that's why I said it wasn't fair that you two should take what I have to take from Dressen."

McCloskey threw down his shovel. "I've had about enough of this riding, Logan. I can take as much as the next man and as long as it was just one corporal, I didn't mind; well,

not too much. You can't buck an officer, not in this man's Army, you can't. From here on, count me out!"

"It's just as well, Mac."

"Me, I think so, too," declared Von Brandenburg, shooting a look of disappointment at McCloskey.

McCloskey caught up his shovel and the three men started to work. They loosened the posts and pulled them out of the ground, then dug new and deeper holes for them. They were tamping down the earth around the posts, sometime later, when Logan heard footsteps approaching. He looked up and winced when he saw Alice Wilder and a woman he assumed to be her sister.

"Tom!" exclaimed Alice.

"Hello," he said lamely. "You catch me at a disadvantage."

"I want to talk to you."

"Of course." He sent a quick look around. "Where?"

"Walk with me. Oh—you haven't met my sister. Harriet, this is Tom Logan."

"How are you?" Logan said, nodding.

Harriet Wilder regarded him sharply. "So, you're Tom Logan. I've heard a lot about you."

"From your husband?"

"Tom—please," pleaded Alice.

"I'm sorry," Logan said.

"As a matter of fact, I *have* heard about you from my husband," Harriet said. "I've heard a lot about you and I —I'd like to hear more."

"Harriet," Alice said, a bit desperately, "would you mind terribly? I—I'd like to talk to him alone."

"This is hardly the place," Logan said.

"Then where *can* I talk to you? I'm leaving tomorrow . . ."

Logan shook his head. "You know that my time isn't my own. There's even less chance now . . ." He broke off. Twenty yards away, Captain Dressen was coming out of the sutler's. He caught sight of Logan talking to Alice, with Harriet standing by and his face darkened with anger.

He strode forward. "Private Logan," he snarled, "how dare you accost my wife?"

"Jim!" cried Alice. "He didn't accost us. I—I stopped here."

"Keep out of this, Alice," snapped Dressen. "You, soldier, you're under arrest."

"Jim," said Harriet Dressen. "You—you mustn't . . ."

"To the guardhouse," ordered Dressen. "On the double!"

Logan clicked his heels together, saluted Dressen and about-faced. He jogged down the walk, toward the guardhouse, Dressen striding along behind him.

Logan trotted up to the sentry before the guardhouse, some distance ahead of Dressen. "Private Logan, reporting under arrest," he told the sentry.

The man stared at him, then saw Dressen coming up. He came to port arms.

Dressen came up, saluted the sentry. "Call the corporal of the guard."

"Corporal of the Guard, post number one!" sang out the sentry.

A corporal popped out of the guardhouse, recognized Captain Dressen and saluted him. "Throw this man in the guardhouse," Dressen said. "I'm preferring charges against him."

He saluted the corporal and turned away abruptly. The corporal signaled to Logan. "All right, soldier!"

15

The guardhouse proper, Logan discovered, was a square room, containing a number of double-deck bunks and two private cells, which opened onto the main room.

There were seven or eight prisoners in the large room, but only one of the cells was occupied. By Chief Rain-in-the-Face, of the Sioux.

A potbellied soldier, who had scarcely driven away the haze of the alcohol from his brain, greeted Logan as the corporal of the guard slammed the door on him.

"Welcome to our little home away from home!"

"Hello," Logan said sourly.

A second prisoner sized up Logan. "Troop C, eh? Your new captain works fast."

A third man offered his estimate of Captain Dressen. "Half of Troop C'll be in here. That Dressen's a corker."

"Know him?" asked Logan.

"In his troop for two years. I'm doing thirty days right now, on account of him. I forgot to salute him."

"Thirty days for that?"

"Second offense. He claimed I was doing it deliberately. What's *your* trouble?"

Logan shook his head and exhaled wearily. "He says I accosted his wife."

The soldier from Dressen's former troop whistled. "You'll be in for life!"

Logan climbed into an empty upper bunk and discovered

that he could look from it directly into the Sioux's cell. The Indian was standing by the iron bars, staring at him. Logan gave him a half salute. The Indian made no response.

Logan closed his eyes and tried to sleep. He found it impossible. He rolled over on his side. His eyes met those of Rain-in-the-Face. After a moment, he sat up and dropped to the floor, landing lightly on his feet. He crossed to the cell.

"How are you, Chief?"

"Why you in jail?" Rain-in-the-Face barked.

"Just one of those things."

"I watch you. You good soldier."

One of the prisoners came up. "Say, you two friends?"

"I was with the detail that brought him in."

"Be damned," exclaimed the man. "That's the army for you. A hero one day, a prisoner the next. Hear the Injuns gave you boys a pretty rough time."

"Ask him," said Logan, nodding to the chief.

The soldier regarded Rain-in-the-Face coolly. "He don't talk to us. Just looks." The man shivered. "Hate to have him loose here with a knife. He'd carve us all up."

"Soldier damfool," growled Rain-in-the-Face.

"Injun damfool," retorted the soldier. "Wait'll Custer gets back. He'll teach you redskins a lesson."

"Where Custer now?" asked Rain-in-the-Face.

"Washington," said the soldier. He grimaced. "Making war talk against Sioux."

"Custer want war, we give him war."

"Nobody wants a war," Logan said quickly.

"Custer wants war," jeered the soldier. "He hates Indians. Says he'll kill every one."

"Stop it," snapped Logan. "He believes you."

"He's a stupid savage." The soldier looked at Logan belligerently. "You one of these birds sticks up for the noble red man?"

"He's a prisoner here like the rest of us."

The soldier turned and appealed to the other prisoners. "Boys, we got an Indian lover here."

The soldier-prisoners gathered around Logan. "Zat so?" one of them asked.

A second man said, "Maybe you prefer his company to ours?"

"I might at that," replied Logan calmly. "He doesn't talk as foolish as you."

The soldier who had started the quarrel held up a hand. "Wait a minute, fellows, we ain't had us a good kangaroo court in quite a while. It's about time we had one."

"Don't waste your time," Logan warned, suddenly angry. "You'll get nothing from me."

"Won't we?" retorted the soldier. "All right, fellows, court's in session."

"Hear, hear," cried one of the men. "What say you, is the prisoner guilty—or guilty!"

"Guilty!" shouted several of the prisoners simultaneously.

"The prisoner is found guilty," cried the first soldier. "Soldier, how much money you got on you?"

"None of your business!"

"It's the business of this court, on account of whatever money you got on you, that's your fine. Said fine to be used for"—the man smacked his lips—"for beer that we'll have smuggled in from the sutler's." He held out his hand. "The fine, prisoner . . ."

"You'll get no money from me," Logan said savagely.

"He's in contempt of court," said the man who had appointed himself judge and prosecutor. "I further sentence the prisoner to twenty good belts with an army belt, where such belts will do the most good. . . ."

He unfastened his belt and pulled it free of his denim trousers. "Take the position!"

"Don't try it," Logan warned.

The prisoner had gone too far to back down. The other prisoners looked at him expectantly. The man swung the heavy web belt and stepped forward.

Logan hit him a hard blow in the midriff. The man reeled back, gasping. Then he came forward swinging the belt at Logan.

Logan threw up his left arm to take the belt on it. It snaked around his arm, the buckle in its swing raking his face. The prisoner pulled on the belt, jerking Logan off balance into a hard left hook that took him high on the cheek.

Logan staggered to one side and the prisoner followed, hitting him again before he could recover his balance. Logan tried to spring aside, but collided with one of the other prisoners who shoved him back roughly.

He took another stunning blow that sent him to his knees. He tried to remain there to clear his head, but the prisoner he was fighting kicked savagely at him. Logan rolled with the kick to the floor, turned over twice and came to his feet.

He sidestepped the rush of the prisoner, landing a stinging blow to the man's ears as he passed. The man cried out in pain and whirled. Logan hit him in the midriff, putting all of his weight into the punch. The man folded over gasping,

and Logan brought up an uppercut that crashed the man to the floor.

Logan stepped back, and a smashing blow from one of the other prisoners drove him to his knees.

"Here you!" cried one of the guards outside the cage. "Break it up in there!"

There was a quick milling around inside the cell block, during which Logan took several kicks and punches; then suddenly his assailants faded away.

A guard came into the cage, swinging a hardwood club around him. Logan barely dodged a healthy swing of the club. "There'll be no more fighting in here," the guard cried. "You know the rules. Three days on bread and water." He stabbed the club at Logan. "You're the new man. You want trouble, this is the place you'll get it."

The guard left the cell block. Logan retreated to his bunk, but the prisoners did not renew their attack upon him.

After a few minutes, however, the man who had fought Logan came over. "Just don't sleep too hard," he sneered.

"I sleep with one eye open," Logan replied savagely. "You try anything, I'll kill you. Remember that!"

The man walked away.

16

Supper was brought in to the prisoners in buckets. Tin plates and cups were provided, and two sentries remained in the cell block while the prisoners ate. Chief Rain-in-the-Face's meal was shoved to him under the bars of the door. Afterwards two armed men escorted him to the latrine and back.

Some minutes after he finished eating, a guard came to the cell-block door. "Logan, front and center!" he called.

Logan stepped to the door and looked at the sentry inquiringly.

"You got a visitor."

The man unlocked the door, led Logan to the little room that was supposed to be the sergeant of the guard's. "You got five minutes—and I stay with you all the time."

Inside the little room Alice Wilder sat on a straight-backed chair. "I received special permission from Headquarters," she said. "Captain Tom." She smiled weakly. "Jim doesn't know I'm here."

"And he won't like it when he finds out."

Alice appealed to the sentry. "Please, could we be alone?"

"Uh-uh, lady. Orders."

"I'm going home tomorrow," Alice said. "It's—impossible for me to stay any longer."

"I know," Logan said wearily. "Well, have a good trip."

"You'll write to me?"

"Why?" Logan asked bluntly.

Her face showed pain. "You're making it difficult."

"It *is* difficult," Logan said bluntly. "It's been difficult every time we've met."

"I know," Alice admitted miserably. "But I couldn't go without telling you that—that I no longer believe Jim. I—I believe *you*."

"Forget me," Logan said, "forget that you ever met me."

"I don't think I could ever forget . . ."

Logan shot a look at the sentry, who stood in the doorway. "With luck," he said, "I'll be in here a long time. You know what I mean—with luck?"

The pain on her face had become anguish. "I—I think I do."

"This is a good place for me," Logan went on. "The food's good. Better than we got during the war." He paused. "Although some of the boys ate pretty good during the war. Ask Jim about that sometime—ask him how *he* liked the food during the war."

"I won't be seeing him after tomorrow." She looked sharply at Logan. "Did you mean that—about asking Jim?"

Logan made an impatient gesture. "Forget it."

The sentry said, "The five minutes are up."

"No!" exclaimed Alice. Then she bit her lip and rose. "You'll write? Please . . ."

"Sure," said Logan easily. He stepped aside, but she reached out and caught his arm.

"You don't know the address. You didn't even ask. That means you have no intention of writing. It's—Annasville, Illinois."

"Annasville," he said. "I'll remember."

She went past him through the door. Logan remained in the little room until the sentry tapped his shoulder. "Come on, soldier."

Logan turned and the man grinned at him. "Not bad. Not bad at all."

Breakfast in the guardhouse was a substantial meal, and Logan soon learned why. At seven thirty, the door of the cell block was thrown open. Outside they were lined up before six troopers, armed with carbines.

The sergeant of the guard came out and called the prisoners to attention.

"Brown, Fiore, parade ground."

Two of the prisoners stepped forward, and one of the troopers came out of ranks and began moving off with them.

"Glecker, Halliday," the sergeant of the guard called out. "Garbage detail!"

The two prisoners moved off with a sentry.

"Holman, Logan, Monahan, wood detail number one."

Logan stepped out with the other prisoners and found that the trooper who was to guard him and his fellow prisoners was Von Brandenburg.

"Right face, forward march!" called out Von Brandenburg smartly.

The prisoners, under the sentry, marched to the stables, where a high-boarded wagon, drawn by two mules, was waiting for them.

"Logan," Von Brandenburg ordered. "You drive. You other men march beside the vagon—and I mean march. You try running and we carry you back in the vagon."

Logan climbed onto the wagon seat and Von Brandenburg clambered up after him, but remained in the body of the wagon where he could swing his carbine to cover Logan or thrust it out toward the walking prisoners.

Logan drove the mules through the gates and headed toward a patch of woods a half mile away. Von Brandenburg moved up closer behind him.

"Dot captain," he said in a low voice, "he t'row the book at you. Sergeant Otis tell me last night—he say to tell you that he make up the—the charges, I think he said. Insulting Mrs. Dressen, insubordination. Striking a noncom——"

"Shuba?"

"Ja, he going to push that. Also, the report say you are continual troublemaker—much troop punishment. You get six months, maybe year."

"Maybe it's just as well," Logan said wearily. "I couldn't take it much more. I'd have killed him in a few days."

"And in six months—maybe a year—when you get out?"

"I'll hate him just as much."

"What he do to you?"

Logan sighed. "I don't think it makes much difference now. It happened during the war. We were prisoners together, at Andersonville. That's a Confederate prison——"

"I have heard of it."

"It wasn't—good. There wasn't enough food, ever. No shelter. A lot of good men died. But Dressen never lost much weight. He was in good shape. . . ."

"Ha!" exclaimed Von Brandenburg. "He is getting food, maybe?"

"We didn't suspect him. Then we started to dig out. A tunnel that took a long time to dig. The men were pretty desperate, for we'd been there a lifetime. Two lifetimes, maybe.

"We got under the wire and then—then the Confederates opened up on us. Nine men were killed, a lot more wounded——"

"You were betrayed!"

"Dressen. They let him go. The rest of us stayed until the end of the war, and some of the boys died."

"Ja," said Von Brandenburg soberly. "I see. I t'ink you have to kill him, maybe."

Von Brandenburg was silent a moment. Then he said, "I do not understand how he could be an officer—a man who has done that."

"He's had nine years to cover up. Only a few of us came out of Andersonville. Dressen was gone. The last place in the world I'd expect to find him was back in the Army. He got in in 'sixty-seven, took examinations for second lieutenant and passed. He's had all these years to build up his background, wipe out the old. No one'd believe me today if I told them about Dressen. But Dressen knows I know—and he's got to get rid of me."

"He will kill you."

"I have a feeling that that's the one thing he's afraid of. I might leave a letter. I might have written down about him and, if I died, the letter'd be produced. Alive, my letter is a lie—spite, that's all. Dead, the letter takes on dignity. Less, though, as time goes on and I've filled up the book. I was a bad soldier, in trouble all the time and Dressen, as my captain, had to punish me. So—I write lies about him. I think that's his scheme, although maybe he thinks the best thing is to make me desert. That's what Shuba wants, too."

"There are not witnesses?"

Logan shrugged. "They're gone. Scattered. There were fifteen, twenty men still alive at the end of the war who knew about Dressen. But I guess they'd suffered enough. They went home—wherever their homes were. I didn't keep a record of any of them. And even if I had—maybe they'd want to be witnesses ten years later, maybe they're glad to forget it."

"*You* never forgot?"

"I couldn't. I was an officer and Dressen was my sergeant. The men trusted him because he was my friend. They died—because I trusted him."

They had reached the poplar forest and Logan and Von Brandenburg climbed down from the wagon. The three prisoners got axes from the wagon and attacked the trees, felling them, trimming off the branches and cutting the logs into short lengths to pile into the wagon.

They worked for about an hour, then Von Brandenburg, who stood at a safe distance, watching the prisoners, signaled to Logan. Logan worked toward him.

"I have been thinking," Von Brandenburg said, "if you were to run suddenly into the woods, I could not follow you because I have two other prisoners."

"No," said Logan, "you'd wind up in the guardhouse yourself. That's usually what happens to a sentry who loses a prisoner."

"Poof!" said Von Brandenburg. "It is not much. I would enjoy the rest."

"It'd be held against you. Besides, I haven't made up my mind yet."

Coming swiftly toward the group by the forest was a galloping horse. Logan moved away from Von Brandenburg and as the horseman came closer he saw that it was Captain Dressen.

"Private Logan!" Dressen called curtly, without dismounting. "Come here!"

Logan walked toward the captain, who had halted out of normal earshot from Von Brandenburg.

Dressen said, "I understand my sister-in-law visited you last night. What did she say to you?"

Logan remained silent.

"Answer me!" snapped Dressen.

"I've already been insubordinate," said Logan.

Dressen looked from Logan to Von Brandenburg. He roared, "Sentry!"

The baron came a few yards closer, presented arms to Dressen. The captain fixed him with an icy scowl.

"A sentry does not allow anyone to converse with his prisoners."

"But you are my captain."

"I'm not the officer of the day. He's the only one who can talk to your prisoners. I suggest, when you return to the guardhouse, that you report yourself as negligent in your duty." He turned to Logan. "Your friend, Logan?"

"No more," said Logan.

"I hope you like the guardhouse!"

Dressen gathered up his reins and gave Von Brandenburg a parting shot. "A little extra drill and some fatigue duty won't hurt you, Trooper. I'll see that you get it."

He whirled his horse and galloped off. Von Brandenburg half raised his carbine. "It is a terrible temptation," he said bitterly.

"Hang on," Logan said soberly.

Back at the Fort the prisoners got a saw and cut the logs into stove length and stacked the wood up along the outside of the guardhouse. They entered the guardhouse for their dinner, then resumed the work in the afternoon, working until recall.

Logan did not mind. The evenings were long enough—too long for him. If he had all day to think as well as the evenings and the nights when he awakened and could not sleep . . .

A small clod of earth dropped on Logan and brought him wide awake. Below him he heard the deep snore of a prisoner. Logan closed his eyes. A faint whisper caused him to open them again.

The whisper was repeated. "Soldier . . . !"

Logan rolled his head to the side. Across the room, in the faint light that came from the guardroom out in front, he saw the shadowy figure of Rain-in-the-Face standing inside his cell. Logan thought he saw a hand gesture to him.

Quietly he swung his feet over the bunk and dropped to the floor. He crossed to the Sioux's cell.

"Soldier," Rain-in-the-Face said softly, "you want escape?"

"How?"

"Say yes and I show."

Without hesitation, Logan said, "Yes."

The Indian reached through the bars and handed Logan a piece of metal. A roughly fashioned key.

"Unlock," said the chief, pointing down to the lock in the door.

Logan put the key into the lock, paused, then turned. The key unlocked the door quietly. Logan pulled open the door and the Indian reached out and gripped his wrist. He pulled him into the cell and closed the door.

He went to the outside wall and dropped to his knees. Reaching under his buckskin shirt, he produced a knife and put the point into the crack between two planks. One of the boards came up easily, having been loosened previously.

There was a hollow under the plank, where earth had been scooped out. Rain-in-the-Face signaled to Logan to move into the hole.

It was a tight squeeze, but Logan got quietly into the hole and was surprised to feel fresh air. He squirmed a foot or so and suddenly rolled free. The outer wall of the cell was the

wall of the Fort. Someone from the outside had dug and scraped the concrete away and filled it up with earth to conceal the opening and now had removed the earth and opened the cavity that led directly to Rain-in-the-Face's cell.

A shadowy figure came out of the gloom, exclaimed softly, but Rain-in-the-Face's head appeared and he spoke swiftly, a word of caution.

The Sioux appeared from under the wall and got to his feet. He gripped Logan's arm.

"Come!"

Bent low, the two escaping prisoners and their Indian ally moved swiftly away from the stockade wall. A hundred feet and they were beyond the pale lights from the Fort. They ran then, a half mile or more, until they came to two Indian ponies staked out on the prairie.

The two Indians talked for a moment in Siouan, then Rain-in-the-Face said to Logan, "You come my lodge?"

"No," said Logan, "I don't think so."

"You escape, soldier catch, shoot you."

"I'll have to take that chance."

"You good to Rain-in-the-Face," the chief said. "I help you."

"You've already helped me."

"Custer make war on Sioux, you no fight?"

"I'm getting rid of this uniform as soon as I can," Logan said. "A deserter can't wear a uniform again. You understand?"

"Rain-in-the-Face understand. Soldier shoot deserter, they catch."

"In wartime, yes. In peace, prison long time."

"No like prison." The chief gripped Logan's arm hard. "You fight yesterday for me. I not forget. Help you escape."

"Thanks, Chief. Now, let me give you some advice. Ride—far. Understand?"

"No catch Rain-in-the-Face again. Pah!"

The Sioux sprang upon the back of one of the ponies. His companion also mounted and in an instant the two Indians were galloping away into the darkness.

Logan stood on the prairie for a few minutes, sizing up his situation. It was midnight or a little later, he estimated. It would be five or six hours before his escape would be discovered. It would be another half hour before the Arikara trackers would pick up the trail. By seven o'clock they would reach this spot, and they would discover that the Indians had gone westward on ponies. They would also find Logan's footprints.

17

There was pursuit, but Logan was wise in such things. He chose the hard patches of ground, went around by way of rocky terrain, and when he came to a stream he walked in the water. He had a head start and that was all that was necessary. If they could not find him within the first few hours, he was safe.

Days later he entered the farmlands of the eastern section of Dakota territory. By that time he was no longer wearing the blue of the cavalry. He wore oddly matched trousers, shirt, a battered hat, and he changed articles of clothing as he moved along. He walked erect and tall, or he shuffled along, bent and stooped.

He crossed into Iowa and after some days he reached the Mississippi, where he took passage on a boat down-river. He walked ashore in St. Louis and after three days of devious activities pertaining to gambling, he stood on the corner of Gravois and Broadway, smoking a thin cheroot. He wore a gray Prince Albert, broadcloth trousers, finely polished shoes and a pearl gray derby. His linen was white and starched, his cravat of rich silk.

He looked like a Southern planter, or a gambler, come up-river. In his pocket was a double-barreled derringer. He crossed the street and entered the door of a fine hotel. In the lobby he saw richly dressed women, men as well dressed as himself.

He stepped to the desk and an obsequious clerk moved up.

"I'd like to see the manager," Logan said to him.

"About accommodations, sir? I can take care of you."

"I'd prefer to speak to the manager."

"Very well, sir. Just a moment." The clerk stepped into a room behind the desk. He returned after a moment, accompanied by a heavy-set man in his mid-forties.

"You wanted to see me?"

"You're Mr. Duncan?" Logan waited until the man nodded, then said, "A friend of mine recommended your hotel to me . . . Mr. Woodson . . ."

The face of Duncan the manager became a mask. "Mr. Woodson? Mmm, I don't seem to recall——"

"He said if I was ever in St Louis to stop here."

"Of course. Our patrons recommend us to their friends. You'd like a room?"

"A quiet room, if you don't mind. In the rear, perhaps, not too high up."

"I have just the thing, on the second floor. You have luggage?"

"It's being sent over."

"Ah, yes, will you register, Mr. . . . ?"

"Logan."

A uniformed servant showed Logan to a room on the second floor, overlooking the alley behind the hotel. Logan washed his hands in a hand-painted basin and sat down in one of the big chairs. There was a discreet knock on the door.

"Come," he called.

The door opened and Duncan stepped in, closing the door carefully behind him.

"I've been thinking over this friend who recommended you to our hotel," the manager said carefully. "I seem to recall the name, although vaguely."

"Mr. Alexander Woodson."

"A short heavy-set man——"

"No, fairly tall, rather slight."

"Ah, yes, of course. From Cincinnati——"

"From Clay County, Missouri. He may have been accompanied by a Mr. Howard."

The hotel manager exhaled heavily. "I make it a point to be extremely careful."

"Naturally," said Logan. "Pinkerton's got a lot of men working for him."

Duncan took a small notebook from his pocket. "Frank was here about six weeks ago. Just stayed overnight. A letter to Samuel's Depot, Kentucky, will reach him without delay."

"He's not in Kentucky, though?"

"I don't believe so. He did mention Tennessee, but naturally he did not give me his address. A letter to the old address in Nebraska will be forwarded promptly to Jesse."

"And Cole?"

"His sister, in Independence."

Logan nodded thoughtfully. "I have a little problem—a personal matter. I want to get some information about a man who—mm—had some dealings with the army of the South."

Duncan winced. "I don't see how I could help you, Mr. Logan."

"I thought you might have become acquainted—through their staying at the hotel—with some of the higher-ranking officers."

"Of course. General Grant has stayed here—he lived in St. Louis at one time. So did General Sherman, and General Sheridan has stopped here many times."

"Southern, Mr. Duncan."

The hotel manager hesitated. "General Shelby is quite friendly with—ah—both Mr. Woodson and Howard."

"Jo Shelby?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact, he's staying at the hotel right now. I could introduce you . . ."

"I'd appreciate it."

"His room is directly down the hall. Ah—I noticed that his door was open as I passed."

"There's no time like the present," said Logan, getting to his feet.

He accompanied the hotel manager down the hall, where Duncan knocked discreetly on a slightly open door.

"Come in!" boomed a voice inside the room. "Come in!"

Duncan opened the door and led the way into a nicely furnished room, where a fierce-eyed man with a chest-length beard was seated in shirt sleeves, working on some papers.

"I'd like you to meet a friend of mine, General," Duncan said smoothly. "Mr.—ah—Tom Logan."

General Shelby got to his feet and thrust out his hand. Logan took it and winced as the general crushed his fingers. "Any friend of yours, Mr. Duncan . . ."

"He is also a friend of Mr. Woodson's, sir," Duncan added.

The general's eyes narrowed. "I see. Sit down, Mr. Logan. Will you join us in a little whiskey, Mr. Duncan?"

"I'm sorry, I have some work to do. I'll leave you two gentlemen." He hurried out of the room.

General Jo Shelby got a decanter and some glasses. "Say when, Mr. Logan . . ."

"When," said Logan after the general had poured out scarcely an inch of whisky.

Shelby filled his own glass with a generous hand, then seated himself. "Logan, eh? Yes, I've heard of you. If I'm not mistaken there was an item about you in the Kansas City papers. Quite a while ago, though. Where have you been recently?"

"In the Army, sir!"

General Shelby half rose to his feet, but dropped back to his chair. "The United States Army?"

"Yes, sir, the Seventh Cavalry."

General Shelby's lips curled in disgust. "Custer's outfit. I never had the pleasure of meeting him during the war, but I had a little difficulty with his old superior, Pleasanton. At Westport." He downed a slug of the whiskey. "I didn't enjoy it. He beat me. Badly, I'll have to admit. Oh, I could say that the old Iron Brigade had been fighting for four weeks straight, that we didn't have a moment's rest for two days and that we

were greatly under strength, but the fact remains that we were beaten. A good soldier, Alfred Pleasanton. I always thought they made a mistake when they removed him after Gettysburg and sent him out here to the West. Too friendly with McClellan, I've heard. . . . You were with Frank and Jesse during the war?"

"No, sir. I—I served under Pleasanton, as a matter of fact. Until Antietam, when I was wounded and taken prisoner."

"I see," said Shelby, stiffening. "A prisoner, eh?"

"At Andersonville. You know about Andersonville?"

"No, I was never east of the Mississippi." General Shelby downed the last of his whiskey, then said brusquely, "Is there anything I can do for you, Mr. Logan?"

"A favor, sir."

"What is it?"

"I want to get some information about an old Army matter——"

Shelby threw up his hand abruptly. "I, sir, served the South. I know nothing of Union Army matters. If you will recall, sir, when Kirby Smith surrendered the Southwestern Army, I was not one of those who surrendered with him. I have not, as they put it, 'come in,' even though I am back in Missouri through their sufferance."

"I know, General. You led your army into Mexico and served with the Emperor Maximilian."

"A good man, betrayed by the French. A gallant soldier."

"The matter, sir," Logan said persistently, "pertains to the South. There was a man with me at Andersonville, my sergeant, for that matter. He made a deal with the prison authorities——"

"Riffraff, Mr. Logan! Men whom Mr. Davis would not even put into ranks. Thieves, scalawags, murderers."

"This man betrayed us, and nine of my fellow prisoners were killed in an escape attempt."

"A prisoner's duty is to try to escape. There is no onus to that. Killed, eh? What was this man's name?"

"Dressen. He was a sergeant at the time. They let him go, after this incident, and he disappeared. I didn't see him again until some weeks ago."

"You settled with him, I trust?"

"No. It was impossible."

"You had no gun?"

"I had a gun, but he had—authority. You see, sir, he's an officer in the Army today. A captain, and I—I was a private under him."

"A difficult situation. He knew you?"

"Yes, that's why—I had to escape. From the guardhouse, I might add."

"I see. You were a threat to him."

"I can't prove a thing. He's covered his trail. He's safe——"

"From a gun?" Shelby looked steadily at Logan, then nodded. "I see, it isn't a matter of killing him. Andersonville, eh? What are you looking for?"

"The commandant, or the officer with whom he made his deal. If I could get his testimony . . ."

Shelby shook his head. "There are no records. They were burned in the great retreat. I'm sure of that. We burned our own records, and they must have had the same orders in the East. Mmm—Major General Rosser was through here only two days ago. I had a drink with him. A brilliant man, sir. He was a classmate of your Custer's, I believe. Something to do with railroads now. Builds them."

"I've heard of General Rosser. You think he might be able to help me?"

"I don't know. He was with Early in the Shenandoah, and if I'm not mistaken he was at Appomattox. I can write him a letter." Shelby hesitated, then reached for the whiskey decanter. "Excuse me for being abrupt a moment ago. You understand my feelings about—ah—certain things. Treachery, such as you've told me, is a crime in *any* army. I would have shot the man, but as I said, those men were unfit to serve in the Army. I have General Rosser's address, and I will write him at once. I should have his reply in five or six days. You'll be in St. Louis that long?"

"I believe I told you that I was a deserter . . ."

"Of course. I understand. And there is, of course, your—ah—connection with the boys. Well, I really can't stay in St. Louis more than two or three days myself, but I can have the letter held here for you—or you can reach me at my home in Waverly."

"It might be best here, sir. When you write the general tell him I merely want to get testimony from the Andersonville man. My quarrel is with Dressen, not the prison people. They may have been justified, from their view."

"Never, sir. I would not have countenanced such a thing. Still. . . . Excuse me, sir. Let me fill your glass!"

18

Annasville. A sleepy little town a dozen miles from the river. A main street, four blocks long, with a block or two of houses on each side of the street.

Logan hired a horse at the livery stable and mounted it. As he was about to ride out of the stable, he said to the attendant, "Let's see, I'm a little mixed up in my directions. The Wilder house is over this way?" He pointed to the north.

The man shook his head. "Uh-uh, south. Second street and let's see, third house in the second block. The white place, with the three white pillars. Can't miss it."

Logan turned his horse south on Main Street and let it go at an easy canter. A few minutes later he pulled up before a white house, probably one of the biggest in the town of Annasville.

He dismounted and tied his horse to an iron ring that was attached to a post driven into the ground. He crossed a well-kept lawn and raised an iron door knocker. Then the door was pulled away under his hand and Alice Wilder, white-faced, was staring at him.

"Tom!" she cried and went into his arms.

Logan was shocked into immobility, then his arm went about her awkwardly.

"You shouldn't have come here, Tom. They're looking for you——"

"Who?"

"Our sheriff, two weeks ago—said he'd been notified by the Army authorities that you might come here." She suddenly stepped back and caught his arm. "Come inside!" She drew him into the house.

A woman who seemed scarcely old enough to be the mother of Alice and Harriet came down a flight of stairs. "Mother," Alice said, "this is Tom Logan."

Logan bowed. "Delighted, ma'am."

"How are you, Mr. Logan? Alice has told us about you. I'm sorry Mr. Wilder isn't here just now. He's in St. Louis on business."

"Mother," said Alice tautly, "I must talk to Tom."

"Of course," smiled her mother. "Excuse me, Mr. Logan."

She turned and walked out of the room. Alice faced Logan frowning. "I had a letter from Harriet. She says Jim Dressen was terribly upset——"

"Upset?"

"Frightened. Angry. They—they quarreled about you. Harriet was going to leave him, and then he broke down and begged her to stick with him. He claimed he could prove that everything he had told Harriet was true, that you had built up a fabric of lies."

"What do *you* think, Alice?"

"I told you that last time up in Fort Lincoln."

"What if I can't prove it?"

"I don't care, Tom. I—I believe you."

He hesitated. "The reason I'm here, Alice . . . I'm *trying* to get proof. I may not and even if I do get it, it may take me weeks, months. I wanted you to know."

Alice's eyes brightened in relief. "I'm glad you told me. I *hope* you'll get the proof. It'll make things easier, but I want you to know, even if you don't get it, I believe you."

"Clearing myself will hurt your sister. It may ruin her life."

"No. Oh, it'll hurt Harriet, I know that. But I don't think she believes in her husband any more. I think—their marriage is already dead."

"I've got to go now."

"You can't. Not so soon."

The front door clapper resounded through the house. Alice gave a start. Logan reached for his pocket in which reposed the little derringer.

A voice called through the front door, "Open up. This is Sheriff Wilson. . . ."

Alice cried out in sudden fright. "Oh, no!"

Logan said tautly, "I'm sorry this had to happen here."

"The back door," Alice cried. "Go out the back. . . ." She kissed Logan swiftly, savagely. "Go!"

Logan ran into the hall, started for the rear of the house.

Behind him the door knocker banged loudly. Logan whipped into the kitchen, sprang across the smooth floor and tore open the door at the rear.

He leaped out—and collided with the muzzle of a Winchester rifle in the hands of Sergeant Shuba!

Shuba was in civilian clothes. His eyes were blazing, his mouth was virtually drooling. "Move," he cried out hoarsely. "Make me shoot!"

The derringer was in Logan's fist, but he was caught squarely by a man who had only to contract his finger, who wanted nothing more in the world than to do that very thing.

Logan let the derringer fall to the ground. A groan was torn from Shuba's throat. "Why'd you do that? You—you called *me* a coward and you . . ."

The sheriff came pounding through the house, burst out the rear door, a revolver in his hand.

"You've got him!"

The sheriff came to the cell in the basement of the county courthouse. "I'm sorry, Logan," he said. "Wasn't anything I could do about it. The Army asked me to be on the lookout for you, and I went out and told the Wilders that I was looking for you. That's all there would have been to it, but then this man Shuba came here. Said he had an Army warrant for you. He laid out there in that ravine all this week, watchin' the house with his spyglass. The minute he seen you he came runnin'! What could I do?"

"You did your duty, Sheriff."

The sheriff scowled. "I guess so, but what makes me mad is that it turned out he didn't have a warrant at all. He's on furlough, doin' this on his own time. Only now that I brought you in, he's telegraphed for this here warrant and they telegraphed back that it's on the way and to hold you for it. When it comes, I've got to turn you over to this here Shuba."

Logan stiffened. "Shuba? He's going to take me back to Fort Lincoln?"

"Yeah. That's what I'm telling you. You ask me, the man ain't fit to carry a gun. He's crazy. He spent an hour slobberin' and ravin' how much he hated you. I wouldn't trust him with a dull knife, even."

"It's all right," Logan said wearily. "I'm an escaped prisoner and I was caught fairly. I'll take what's comin' to me."

"You take it well, Logan. But I don't like it." The sheriff went off, shaking his head.

Wearily Logan stretched out on the raised wooden platform that served the cell in lieu of a bed.

Shuba had won.

Dressen had won.

This was the end of the road for Logan. The day before there had been hope. Now it was all gone. Apprehended, an Army deserter served six months or a year in a miltary prison and then received a dishonorable discharge. The Army was through with him, and the man had only to live with his own conscience.

But an escaped prisoner? He was a criminal. He served time in a miltary prison, and he was released. But the record was always there—a criminal record.

Yet Logan knew that this stigma would not be his. He would never reach the prison alive. Shuba was his mortal

enemy. At Shuba's hands he could expect only one thing. And Shuba would be clear.

"He tried to escape," would be Shuba's report.

Footsteps sounded on the cement basement floor and Logan sat up. The sheriff was returning. With him came Alice Wilder. She ran past the sheriff to the bars of the cell and reached through them to grip Logan's hands.

"Oh, my dear!"

"The second time you've visited me in prison," Logan said crookedly. "It's getting to be a habit."

"I'm going to get you out of this," she cried. "I've telegraphed to father in St. Louis. He'll be home tomorrow. We'll get you the best lawyer——"

"The Army doesn't recognize lawyers," Logan said.

"The Army won't get you. We—we won't let them take you."

Logan looked over her head at the sheriff. The latter shook his head soberly.

"Please, Miss Alice," said the sheriff, "I shouldn't have let you come down in the first place. This man Shuba's talkin' all over town. Judge Kearney's already warned me——"

"Five minutes," cried Alice. "Give me just five minutes alone."

"I can't, Alice. I'd like to help you—you know that. But I—it's as much as my job's worth."

"The sheriff's right, Alice," Logan said soberly. "He's got to do his duty."

"What about my duty to you? I'm not going to stand by and see you sent to prison, or worse perhaps, just because——"

A faint voice shouted upstairs and the sheriff groaned. "Somebody's calling me upstairs. I've got to be going . . ."

"A minute!' cried Alice poignantly. "One minute, that's all I ask."

Boots pounded stairs and Shuba burst into the basement. He saw the sheriff and Alice outside Logan's cell and yelled hoarsely, "What's goin' on here?"

The sheriff said, "The prisoner's having a visitor."

"You can't do that," cried Shuba. "The telegram said, 'Hold prisoner incommunicado.' I looked it up; that means you ain't allowed to let nobody talk to him. Nobody!"

"Until the warrant actually arrives," the sheriff said bluntly, "I'll treat the prisoner the way *I* want to treat him. You've no authority here in my jail. Get out!"

The wild-eyed Shuba backed away. "I'll go to the judge. You got to do what he says. I represent the Army—and the

Army's got rights above everybody." He darted a venomous look at the girl. "She's his sweetheart. For all you know, they're plottin' an escape. Maybe you didn't search her, 'cause she's a woman. Maybe she slipped him a knife, or a gun."

"You're insane, man," declared the sheriff.

"*I* caught him. He's *my* prisoner. I'm responsible for him. The telegram said so . . ."

"Get out of here!"

Shuba backed away. "I'll see the judge . . ." He turned, clambered up the stairs.

The sheriff groaned. "Please, Miss Alice!"

"You'd better go," Logan said.

Alice said hopelessly. "All right." Her misery was so abject that Logan exclaimed, "Wait! Sheriff, I wonder if I could write a letter . . ."

The sheriff frowned. "I'd have to read it."

Alice went back to Logan. "I'll mail it."

"No, Miss Alice, I can't let you do that," said the sheriff. "I'm sorry."

Logan reached through the bars and, catching her hand, pulled her up to the barred door. He put his mouth to hers, between the bars and the sheriff, assuming that they were kissing, turned his eyes away, embarrassed.

Logan whispered to Alice, "Send a telegram to Alexander Woodson, Samuel's Depot, Kentucky. Tell him Tom Logan is here. That's all!"

Alice drew away, turned. "All right, Sheriff. And—thanks!"

19

The warrant came on the morning of the second day, and the sheriff at Annasville reluctantly handed Logan over to Sergeant Shuba, who was by authority of the Army assigned to deliver Trooper Thomas Logan to the guardhouse at Fort Abraham Lincoln in Dakota Territory.

The lapse of two days had not changed Shuba in any way. His eyes were bright, his nostrils flared as he came to the cell where Logan was awaiting him. He had a pair of handcuffs that weighed at least three pounds, heavy metal bands, with a short link of chain holding them together.

"No leg shackles?" Logan asked sarcastically.

"You gotta walk to the train and . . ." Shuba licked his lips salaciously.

"Aren't you afraid I might run?"

The green light that glowed in the cavalry sergeant's eyes gave Logan the answer. "I got orders. You try escapin' . . . ?" He tapped the butt of the Navy revolver that was thrust in his belt.

He marched behind Logan a half-dozen feet to the railroad depot. There were two or three people at the depot, but they all gave Shuba and his prisoner a wide berth.

The rails began to whine as a train appeared in the far distance. Logan looked sharply at Shuba. "That's a southbound train."

"Sure," said Shuba. "Northbound don't come here until late tonight. We take this to St. Louis, then catch the northbound. Save time." He grinned wickedly. "Sooner you get back, sooner you start doin' your time."

Hurrying toward the depot platform, from the street a short distance away, was Alice Wilder. Shuba saw her, too.

He gestured angrily. "Stay away!"

Alice came on. Shuba drew his revolver. "I said, stay away!" he roared.

Alice stopped. "Tom," she called.

The train came rocketing toward the depot. Shuba pointed his revolver and fired. The bullet kicked up splinters less than a yard from Alice's feet.

Logan cried out, "Keep back, Alice, the man's crazy!"

Shuba bared his teeth and slammed the gun barrel into Logan's stomach. "We'll see who's crazy. I ain't takin' no chances anybody tryin' anythin' on me. I'm goin' to take you back to Fort Lincoln—dead or alive!"

The train roared into the depot. Logan raised his manacled hands in a farewell to Alice. This, he thought, was the last time he would ever see her.

Shuba shoved him toward the train steps, prodded him with the muzzle of the revolver. "Up!"

Logan climbed up to meet the conductor in the vestibule. The man's eyes widened. "Sergeant Shuba of the U. S. Army," Shuba declared loudly. "I want a pair of seats by ourselves."

The conductor entered the train, looked quickly up the aisle and then hurried forward. He talked to a couple of passengers, and by the time the train was rolling again he had a double seat at the far end of the coach.

Shuba herded Logan forward and forced him to sit facing him. He kept his revolver in his lap and planted his feet firmly on the edge of the seat. "Open the window a little," he ordered Logan.

With some difficulty Logan raised the window a few inches.

Shuba took a small key from his pocket. "For your handcuffs," he said, "the only key there is. Just so you don't get ideas. . . ." He flipped the key through the window. "Now, close the window."

Logan pushed down the window and regarded the sergeant through slitted eyes.

Shuba said, "Thought you had somethin' on me all the time we was in Dakota, didn't you?"

"I didn't have anything on you," retorted Logan. "You had it on yourself. If a man's a coward, he knows it."

"Keep talking," gritted Shuba. "Keep talkin'. While you still got a chance."

"Where's it going to happen?" Logan asked. "Here on the train, with a lot of people around?"

Shuba's eyes glittered. "What're you talkin' about?"

"I know I'll never reach Fort Lincoln."

"Oh, you'll get there, all right. Dead—if you try to escape."

"What if I don't try to escape? Can you risk that? Can Captain Dressen risk it?"

"I don't know what's between you and Dressen," growled Shuba. "And I don't want to know."

Logan hunched down on the train seat and made himself as comfortable as he could. He closed his eyes and pretended to sleep, but he remained awake—thinking.

The train roared through southern Illinois and after three hours, rolled across the bridge over the Mississippi and into the depot.

Shuba and Logan got off the train and were the cynosure of many eyes as Shuba herded Logan toward the ticket windows where he inquired about a schedule that would take them to St. Paul, where they could get on the Northern Pacific for the last lap of the journey across western Minnesota and into Dakota Territory.

A Chicago-bound train was scheduled to leave within an hour, Shuba learned. It made conections with a westbound train at a junction called Chenoa, halfway between St. Louis and Chicago. This train, in turn, took them into Iowa, where they could transfer to a train going north to St. Paul. It required two changes and a wait of an hour to an hour and a half at each junction, but in the long run it was a more direct route than going by way of Chicago and would save eight hours in total time.

Shuba paid for the tickets from a thick roll of bills. Logan started to turn away, and a sudden shock jolted him as he passed a man who had been standing behind Shuba listening to the sergeant getting his schedule and tickets.

He was a big man, two or three inches over six feet and well over two hundred pounds in weight. He was well dressed in a business suit of expensive material.

Logan risked a quick look over his shoulder. The big man was buying a ticket at the window. Shuba shoved Logan.

"Come on, get a move on."

They sat in the waiting room until the gates leading to the train platform were open, but Logan did not see the big man again. Not until they were on the train. Then the man came in and took a seat facing the rear, where his eyes could meet Logan's.

The train moved out of the depot, crossed the river and began to roll north and east in the direction of Chicago. Darkness fell over the Illinois farmlands.

The news butcher came through the train selling sandwiches and Shuba bought two. He ate both himself and made no mention of providing food for Logan.

Logan kept his eyes closed, only now and then opening them and looking beyond Shuba at the big man four seats away. The man returned Logan's glances, but gave no sign of recognition.

Shortly after ten the conductor came through the coach. "Chenoa Junction next stop. Change for Rock Island, Davenport and points west."

Shuba leaned forward and struck Logan sharply. "That's us."

The train ground to a stop and Shuba drew his revolver and prodded Logan off the train onto a depot platform. Three or four other passengers alighted, among them the big man.

The Chicago train moved off and its taillight was soon gone. The platform on which the waiting passengers stood was a short one, lighted poorly by a lantern. Logan and Shuba stood under the lantern, and Shuba nervously kept his gun in his hand. His eyes seldom moved from Logan for more than an instant.

A coward at heart, he was dangerous because of it. He had a gun in his hand, and he would shoot on the slightest provocation.

A man came out of the darkness and strolled across the platform. Logan watched him. He reached the heavy-set man, passed him without the slightest sign of recognition. A tremor shot through Logan. For the first time in days he felt relaxed.

The westbound train came and they boarded it. The heavy-set man found a seat a short distance from Logan and Shuba. The man who had appeared on the Chenoa platform, but who had not been on the Chicago-bound train, took a seat across

the aisle from the heavy-set man. He was a lean, hard-faced man of about thirty.

The train roared through the night. Shuba, Logan noted, was having difficulty remaining awake. And, as Shuba became drowsier, Logan became more alert. Once Shuba's eyes closed entirely and remained closed.

Cautiously, Logan leaned forward. His manacled hands reached out—and then Shuba's eyes flicked open. "Try it!" he snarled. "I'm just lookin' for an excuse."

"You going to stay awake all the way to Dakota?" Logan asked.

"We ain't goin' that far," Shuba sneered.

Logan looked past Shuba, caught the eyes of the heavy-set man. He nodded slightly. The big man hesitated, shook his head slightly. His lips formed a word that Logan guessed was "Wait."

He settled himself down, closed his eyes. A few minutes later he opened them and found Shuba staring at him.

Ahead, the train whistle blasted the night, "Whoo-hoo-hoo!"

The wheels began to grind on the rails. Brakes squealed and the train came to an abrupt halt, jolting the sleeping passengers awake. Logan, his manacled hands in his lap, stiffened.

Outside, in the distance, a gun banged. Shuba came half to his feet. "What's that?"

A few seats away the big man and the lean one across the aisle from him rose to their feet. One faced the front of the coach, the other the rear.

"Everybody sit still!" the big man cried out. A gun appeared in his hand. He fired it into the ceiling.

"This is a holdup!" called out the second man.

"A holdup!" bleated Shuba, in sudden panic. "Wh-what'll I do?"

"Drop your gun," Logan advised.

Shuba reeled out into the aisle. His gun hung loosely in his hand.

"Drop it," ordered the heavy-set man.

Shuba's eyes threatened to pop from his face. Saliva dripped from his mouth. "No," he cried hoarsely. "This can't happen—now . . ."

The heavy-set man started toward Shuba. Shuba bleated and his gun came up. It belched fire and smoke and thunder —simultaneously with the big man's gun. But Shuba's bullet tore into a seat, wounding a passenger on the far side of it.

The big man's gun was aimed true. The bullet hit Shuba high in the left shoulder, spun him around. The Navy gun

dropped from his hand, and Shuba pitched to the floor on his face. Before he landed the Navy Colt was in Logan's manacled hands.

The big man came forward. "Hello, Tom," he said calmly.

"Thanks, Cole," exclaimed Logan in relief.

Cole Younger indicated the fallen Shuba. "Damn fool," he growled. A masked man sprang into the coach at the far end, fired a shot into the roof of the coach, then saw Cole Younger and the lean man behind him.

"All right, boys, let's work fast." He whisked off his hat. "Dump your wallets and jewelry into this as I come along."

Logan winced. "Do they have to do that?"

Cole Younger shrugged. "Got to make expenses."

But he took no part in the robbing of the passengers. The lean man who had come on at Chenoa and the masked bandit made a quick, thorough canvass of the coach.

"Let's go," said Cole Younger to Logan. Then his eyes fell to Logan's manacles. "I'd better get the key from him——"

"There isn't any," Logan said. "He threw it away."

"He wasn't taking any chances. Well, come on."

They clambered down from the train. A man came running from the engine, saw them and yelled, "This way!"

Logan and Cole Younger ran toward the engine. A masked man was up on the platform, covering the engineer and fireman with a revolver. He saw Cole and Logan and nodded. "Ready?"

"Start moving," he ordered the engineer, "and keep moving."

The engineer pushed forward on the throttle, and the bandit dropped down from the platform to the ground. In the rear the two outlaws leaped from the train.

A man rode out of the darkness leading five horses. "Up you go, Logan," cried the man who had been in the engine.

Logan mounted one of the horses, gripped the bridle reins in both hands and kneed his horse.

They were off then, heading across country. A half hour later the six horsemen halted in a small clearing surrounded by a stand of poplars. The masks were off now, and Logan looked around the circle of faces.

"You got the telegram?" he said to a tall, lean man.

Alexander Franklin James, who sometimes used the name Alexander Woodson, nodded. "I wasn't even surprised. General Shelby wrote me only the day before. Said he had a letter for you."

"Time for all that later," growled the man who was apparently the leader, the man who was the greatest outlaw the country had ever known. "We got to get those bracelets off

him and we got to scatter. There'll be fifty posses out for us by morning."

"Thanks for coming, Jesse," Logan said.

Jesse James made a gesture of dismissal. "We never let a man down yet. Even though you haven't been in touch with us for over a year. Frank," he said to his brother, "you scouted this country. Where can we find a blacksmith that ain't right in town?"

Frank James pointed off to the southwest. "There's a crossroads store over here a couple of miles. Blacksmith shop next to it and a couple of houses. Imagine the folks live right there, and I guess we can wake them up, all right."

20

Eight days later, in the town of Waverly, Missouri, Logan entered the offices of the town's leading industry, a rope factory.

"Mr. Logan to see General Shelby," he said to an elderly bookkeeper who presided over the little office.

The clerk looked at the wall clock. "Five minutes after three," he said. "Julep time. Yes, sir, I imagine you'll find the general at the hotel down the street. In the bar."

Logan walked down the street and entered the hotel. Voices came from the bar that opened off the lobby and he went in. General Shelby stood at the bar, facing three fellow townsmen. A tall glass was in his raised hand and he was saying, "I give you General Longstreet, gentlemen!" Then he saw Logan. "Wait, gentlemen, here's a Yankee. Mr. Logan, we've toasted President Davis, General Lee and General Price. We were just about to drink to General Longstreet. What do you say to that?"

"A fine man and a gallant officer," Logan said.

"You'd drink to a Confederate, sir?"

"Why not?"

"Rufus!" roared the general. "A glass for the gentleman from the North."

A bartender hurriedly thrust a glass at Logan.

"General Longstreet!" announced General Shelby.

Logan tossed off his drink and tendered the glass to the bartender. When it was refilled he raised it. "And now it's my turn. To General Grant!"

A hush fell upon the barroom. General Jo Shelby stared at

Logan, his face red from ill-concealed rage. "Never!" he suddenly shouted.

"Butcher Grant," roared one of the general's drinking companions.

Logan downed his whiskey, while the others gripped their glasses. Logan handed his emptied glass to the bartender, for a refill. When he got it he faced the coldly angry Shelby once more. "You can't refuse to drink to General Alfred Pleasanton?"

General Shelby shuddered. He choked, coughed, then suddenly held up his glass. "A gallant officer and a great soldier!"

"A Yankee," protested one of Shelby's friends.

"The only man who ever defeated Jo Shelby in battle," roared the general. "I give you General Pleasanton!"

He downed his drink in huge gulps and his friends followed suit. "Fill them up again," Shelby cried. "We've got to drink another toast quickly. To—to my old companion-in-arms, General Marmaduke."

They drank to General Marmaduke and then Logan proposed General Sheridan. There was some protest, but General Shelby roared it down and the toast was drunk. Ten minutes later after the health of some additional Southerners had been drunk, Shelby finally consented to drink to President Grant.

Then Logan, his head in a whirl, gripped the general's arm. "I'm sorry, General, but this is as far as I can go. I understand you have a letter for me."

"Of course I have. Been carrying it with me for two weeks. Here." He produced a crumpled envelope. Logan carried it down the bar and opened it.

It was written to General Jo Shelby and was signed George Rosser. After the usual flowery exchanges of health and well wishes, Rosser, the former classmate of Custer's who had reached as high a rank in the Confederate Army as Custer had in the Union Army, said:

> . . . About this Andersonville matter. I hit a stroke of luck. A kinsman of mine, while home on sick leave, was assigned for a short period of time to guard duty at Andersonville. He tells me that conditions there were deplorable under Major Hollister, but he adds that Major Hollister disliked the assignment of prison commandant so greatly that he stayed away as much as possible and actual authority was assumed by a Captain Menlo, who sold most of the food that was issued to the prisoners and pocketed the proceeds. An investigation was started by the Confederate

authorities early in 1865, but it was suspended when the Union Army under General Sherman overran the district. Captain Menlo disappeared at the time. My kinsman believes that he went to California, but it so happens that a man named Menlo, who claimed to be a former Confederate officer, worked for me for a while on the Northern Pacific. He was a scoundrel and a shiftless worker and I was compelled to dismiss him. However, my former paymaster has the paybooks of all the workers on the railroad and as a rule we kept the home addresses of all workers. I have written to him and as soon as I receive further word, I will advise you, so that you can pass on the information to your friend, Mr. Logan . . ."

Logan returned to the general. "This letter is of great help, but General Rosser says that he will write further information——"

"He's written it," said General Shelby. "The letter came yesterday."

He reached into his pocket and brought out a second letter. Logan tore it open. It contained just a brief note: "Captain Menlo wrote to his family from Deadwood, in the Black Hills, four months ago. He said he was prospecting for gold. They've had no further information from him."

"That tell you what you want to know?" General Shelby asked.

Logan nodded. "As much as I could hope for. I've still got to find Captain Menlo."

"That may be a job. Well, sir, I've time for just one more toast——"

"No," exclaimed Logan, "I couldn't stand another!"

When Logan entered Deadwood in Dakota Territory on a bitterly cold day in April, he wore a shabby overcoat over the rough clothing he had bought for the Black Hills country.

Deadwood was sprawled along both sides of a winding ravine. It had received its name from the burned-out trees on both sides of the canyon. A fire some years before had gutted the forest, and the only standing trees were scorched and dead.

No mining was going on during the winter, but the town was still crammed with people, who were impatiently waiting for the spring thaws that would enable them once more to tear at the ground in the hope of extracting its wealth.

Logan got a room at one of the hotels that had been hastily constructed of rough lumber. Later, he descended to the saloon and gambling hall that occupied most of the first floor and was the most profitable part of the business.

The place was crowded with bearded miners, interspersed with men who made their living from the miners. Gamblers and card sharps. Logan had a glass of beer at the bar, then turned to size up the crowd.

His eyes came to rest upon a man in a blue uniform, and a ripple of apprehension ran through him. He walked toward the man and noted that his uniform bore the insignia of the Seventh Cavalry. The soldier, however, was a stranger to Logan.

Logan returned to the bar and ordered another glass of beer. "I didn't know there was an Army fort near by."

"They built a post here last fall. Two cavalry troops in it."

"Happen to know what troops?"

The bartender shrugged. "M and O, I think. We may be needing 'em before summer. You'll notice there ain't a single Injun in town. Usually there's a dozen of them around, seein' what they can steal. They've all gone back to their lodges this winter. C'n mean only one thing—the warpath, come good weather."

"They've been predicting war with the Sioux for the last two years," said Logan.

"The government declared war when it opened up the Black Hills to the whites," said the bartender. "You can expect fighting as soon as Custer clears up his own trouble in Washington."

"I hadn't heard that he was in trouble."

"He's always in trouble," declared the bartender. "He's testifying before a committee of Congress, and he's put his foot in it. The President's down on him and if you know Custer——"

"I don't . . ."

"If you know him, whenever he gets in trouble himself he starts chasing the Indians. The people like that and the newspapers like it. The politicians don't, but it's Custer's way of getting himself in the right. The Army can't punish a hero."

The bartender's philosophy did not agree with Logan's own, but he had found out what he wanted to know about the soldiers of the Seventh Cavalry being in Deadwood, and he moved away.

He left the saloon and the hotel and crossed the street to a similar place. He found an empty seat at a poker game and sat down. He won a few dollars, and in the course of the general conversation brought up the name of Menlo. None of the other players had ever heard it.

He left the game and found a third saloon up the street. Here, too, he managed to inquire if any of the players knew a prospector named Menlo. None did.

It was during the third day of Logan's stay in Deadwood that he finally found a man to whom the name of Menlo meant something. This was a bewhiskered miner who had sat down in a poker game in which Logan was playing.

"Menlo? Cap Menlo?"

"Yes, I believe he was an officer in the Confederate Army."

"That's what he used to tell me," the miner declared, "but he didn't look or act like no officer to me. Meaner man I never saw."

"Where *did* you see him?"

"His claim up on Otter Creek——"

"Where's Otter Creek?"

"Otter Creek runs into Rosebud Creek."

"And where's Rosebud?"

"Hell, man," swore the miner, "you don't know much of anything, do you?"

"If you could draw me a map . . ."

"I ain't much good at drawin' maps, but I can tell you just how to get there. You go west of Deadwood——"

"Are we playing poker?" exclaimed one of the players, "or are we going prospectin'?"

It was an hour before the miner left the game, without a cent in his pocket, but by that time he had imbibed a number of glasses of whiskey and was in no condition to talk. Logan took the man to his room and dumped him on the bed. Logan himself slept on the floor.

The next morning the miner groaned and sat up in Logan's bed. "Lord, what a head!" Then he blinked at Logan. "Who're you?"

"Logan's my name. I brought you here last night."

The man groaned. "I remember seeing you in the game." He clapped a hand to his pockets. "How'd I do?"

"You went broke."

The man clapped his hands to his head. "That happens every time. I work like a dog, getting together a poke, then I come to town and in two days, three, maybe a week, I'm broke." He looked suspiciously at Logan. "You win my poke?"

"No. I lost some money in the game myself."

"Then why'd you bring me up here?"

"You know a man I'm looking for. Cap Menlo."

"That's right, I remember something about you asking me. Cap a friend of your'n?"

"I haven't seen him in twelve or thirteen years."

"That ain't what I asked you. I asked you if he was a friend?"

Logan hesitated, then shook his head. "He wasn't a friend the last time I saw him."

"You gunning for him?"

"I won't kill him unless he tries to kill me."

The miner screwed up his face. "That ain't a straight answer. Mind you, Cap Menlo's no friend of mine, but damned if I'd turn him in to a man'd kill him. I wouldn't do that to nobody."

"You're broke," Logan said.

"I been broke before. I still got me a claim."

"How will you work it? You need supplies."

"I c'n always get a grubstake. Look, Mister, if you think I'd sell out a man, you got another think coming."

Logan said, "Let's go and get some breakfast."

"A breakfast ain't going to change my mind."

"Let's eat and then we'll talk."

The miner was willing and the two men left the hotel and found a restaurant. On the way to the eating place, Logan learned that his companion's name was Dan Vesser and that he hailed originally from Massachusetts.

The man's origin gave Logan the clue to the line to follow. "You were in the Army?"

"I shore was," Vesser replied. "I enlisted right at the start and I was with Ben Butler when he captured New Orleans. Them Rebs down there gave us a rough time."

"But you were never in one of their prison camps?"

"Uh-uh, they tell me they was hell."

"Cap Menlo was one of the Rebs in charge of their worst camp, Andersonville," Logan said. "I was a prisoner there for almost three years."

Vesser whistled. "So that's why you're lookin' for him!"

"All I want from him is a paper," Logan said, "a paper admitting he bribed one of the prisoners to sell out his comrades."

"You'll never get such a paper from Cap Menlo!" exclaimed Vesser. "To listen to him tell it, he practically won the war singlehanded. If Jeff Davis had taken his advice the Confederates would be here in Deadwood right now."

"The man he bribed," Logan said, "was once my friend."

"I see what you mean," Vesser said dubiously. "But the war's been over a long time. Me, I've had plenty of enemies in my time, but I never held no grudge that long."

"Did you ever see nine of your comrades murdered in cold blood?" Logan shot at him.

Vesser winced. "Whoa, now, that's putting it pretty strong. Like I said, I ain't no friend of Cap Menlo, but I had a

claim right next to his for six months, and I got to know him pretty well. Menlo ain't got the nerve to kill nine men."

"He didn't do the killing. He ordered it done."

Vesser finished his coffee in silence. Then he looked at Logan. "Tell you what I'll do. I don't know whether to believe your story or not, but I'll take you to Cap Menlo's claim. I got to go there myself anyway. On'y one thing, you got to give me your gun before we reach Otter Creek."

"What if he pulls a gun on me?"

"I'll have your gun and mine. You can argue it out any way you like, but I ain't goin' to have no killin' on my conscience. Is that a deal?"

Logan hesitated, then suddenly nodded. "When do we start?"

"Soon's there's a break in the weather. In the meantime," Vesser chuckled, "you can grubstake me."

21

The spring thaws were long overdue, but the break in the weather finally came a week later. A warm wind blew from the south, and the snows in Deadwood gulch melted in a single day. The ground was a sea of mud during the day and froze at night. Vesser wanted to wait until the mud dried out, but Logan prodded him, and the next day the two men rode out of Deadwood mounted on horses and leading a mule loaded with supplies.

They camped twenty-five miles from Deadwood that night and the next day traversed another twenty-five or thirty miles north and west.

The third day they crossed the trail of unshod horses. Vesser and Logan dismounted to study the trail. The miner indicated a rough groove in the earth. "Travois," he said. "They're moving their women and children."

"It's only a small party," Logan said.

"Yeh, but this is awful early in the year for them to be movin' around. I don't like it."

They mounted and continued north. An hour later they cut the trail of another party of Sioux and again they noted the marks of travois. The trail was a day old, however.

Vesser looked shrewdly to the north and west. "They won't miss Otter Creek by much."

"How many men are wintering at Otter Creek?"

"Seven, eight, seven not counting myself. We been doing

a little work. Build a fire, melt the gravel and shovel it down to the water where we can wash it as soon as the creek unfreezes. We saw Injuns last fall and summer, but they didn't bother us. But with all this talk about a Injun war . . ."

They came across a third Indian trail late in the afternoon. Vesser studied it carefully, then straightened. "This morning, maybe only three-four hours ago. Headin' right for Otter Creek, too."

"How far are we from your camp?"

"We ought to hit it by noon tomorrow."

"The Indians will reach it this evening. But they don't like to fight at night. Besides, they have their women and children with them."

"There's six braves in this batch," said Vesser. "If they run into one of the other parties they got our boys outnumbered."

"I was thinking," Logan said. "If we traveled straight through the night we might get to the camp before daybreak."

"What if we run into the Injuns?"

"They won't be moving around after dark. You know this country, and we ought to be able to get past them."

Vesser nodded dubiously.

During the night the mule, dead tired, balked. They transferred some of the food to their horses and pushed on without the mule. It was still dark when they came to a shallow stream.

"Otter Creek," Vesser said in a low voice. "I figure we're about two miles upstream from the camp."

"Let's get there!"

They started downstream, following the winding creek. After a mile they dismounted and proceeded on foot. The false dawn was already showing in the sky, and in a few minutes the real dawn began breaking.

Suddenly Vesser, who was in the lead, stopped. "You hear a horse?"

"I heard something," said Logan. "Let's push on."

A stone splashed into water ahead. Logan drew the Winchester from the saddle scabbard. "You still want my guns before we reach camp?"

"Uh-uh," said Vesser softly. "You keep 'em."

Logan slapped the rump of his horse, sending it on ahead of him. Ahead, a shadow slipped out from behind some rocks. There was a swishing sound and Logan's horse reared up, screaming horribly as an arrow plunged into its breast.

Logan thrust the muzzle of his rifle out, squeezed the trigger. An Indian let out a whoop and moccasined feet rushed toward Logan and Vesser. Behind Logan, Vesser fired and an Indian plunged to the ground. But there were other In-

dians behind and on the land side of the creek. They came swooping upon Logan and Vesser. Logan levered the Winchester, had time for one more shot, then hurled the gun into a man rushing at him.

He whipped out his revolver, fired twice and something smashed him on the side of the head. He fired again even as he was falling, then darkness overwhelmed him.

Logan was aware of a terrible throbbing in his head. He kept his eyes closed, hoping that the pain would cease, but when it didn't, he finally opened them. The slight movement of his eyelids caused an extra twinge of pain, and a small groan was forced from his lips.

The logs of a cabin roof were over his head. There was movement off to one side, and after a moment Logan rolled his eyes to the right. They met the glittering black eyes of an Indian in a full buckskin suit.

Logan's arms felt numb and he tried to move them. He found that he was unable to do so. They were bound together behind his back. His legs, he discovered, were also tied.

A voice said, "You awake, Logan?"

It was Vesser's voice. Logan fought the pain and rolled over. Vesser, bound hand and foot, lay three feet away.

"We're goners," said Vesser.

"This the camp?"

"What's left of it. They burned most of the shacks."

"Cap Menlo?"

"I dunno. They got most of the boys, though. I—I saw them when they brung us in. Can't figure out why they took us prisoner."

The Indian who stood in the doorway of the cabin suddenly turned and stamped out. Outside, he shouted and moccasins padded the ground. An Indian came into the shack and looked down at Logan.

It was Rain-in-the-Face.

"Rain-in-the-Face!" exclaimed Logan.

"You kill Sioux," Rain-in-the-Face accused.

"They tried to kill me."

"You promise no fight Indian," Rain-in-the-Face persisted.

"That was five moons ago," Logan said. "I haven't fought any Sioux until this morning. And then I only fought to keep myself from being killed."

"Sioux at war with white man," the chief said solemnly. "Custer come soon with many pony soldier."

"I'm not in the Army any more," Logan said. "You know that."

"Rain-in-the-Face know. Army want shoot you."

"They probably would if they caught me."

Rain-in-the-Face reached out with his toe and kicked Vesser. "This your friend?"

"Yes."

"He hunt gold in Black Hills. Make much trouble between white man and Indian."

"Chief," Logan said earnestly, "you know that I've had trouble with the Army. It goes back to a man who has been my enemy for many years——"

"Captain Dressen, I hear."

"Yes. Well, I can get out of this trouble if I find a man —a man who can help me beat Dressen. This man"—rolling his eyes toward Vesser—"came with me to help me find him. He was here."

Rain-in-the-Face shook his head. "Then he no help you. Everybody dead. Make big fight against us last night. We kill everybody." He shook his head. "Kill Sioux, too."

"If Menlo's dead, then I'm licked," said Logan, in sudden abject surrender.

Rain-in-the-Face drew his knife, stooped and cut the thongs that bound Logan's wrists. He also slit the ankle bindings. Excruciating pain flowed through Logan's arms and legs as the blood began circulating once more through his limbs. He sat up, rubbed his ankles furiously with his numbed hands, stopped and massaged his wrists. Finally he was able to get to his feet.

He pointed to the prone Vesser. "You cut him loose?"

"No!" exploded Rain-in-the-Face. "You friend. Him enemy."

"He's *my* friend."

The Sioux chief hesitated, then suddenly tossed his knife to Logan. The latter stooped to cut Vesser's bindings. "Don't bother," the miner suddenly snarled. "I want no favors from a damned renegade."

"Don't be a fool," snapped Logan. He cut the buckskin thongs that bound Vesser, and the miner angrily sat up and began massaging his legs. Logan handed back the knife to Rain-in-the-Face.

"Can I see the dead men?" Logan asked.

Rain-in-the-Face turned to the door. He walked out. Logan followed.

At sight of the white man following the chief out of the cabin three or four Sioux came forward, but Rain-in-the-Face waved them away. He spat out a few words and the Sioux fell back sullenly.

The cabin from which they stepped was a dozen yards from the shallow stream. Two corpses lay on the ground between the cabin and the water.

Logan looked into the faces of both. He frowned and shook his head. Rain-in-the-Face pointed upstream. Logan found three more dead men, but he could make no decision. Three or four of the five men would have been of the right age, but it was many years since Logan had seen Captain Menlo of the Confederate Army. And then the man had been in uniform, clean-shaven. These men wore rags, were whiskered and unkempt.

Logan called, "Vesser!"

Vesser came out of the cabin, hesitated as he saw the hostile glances of the Sioux, then came forward. "You said there were seven men here. There are only five bodies."

"Then they didn't get all of them!"

"Menlo—is one of these Menlo?"

"Thought you said you knew him?"

"I'm not sure. It's so long."

Vesser looked at the two men near the cabin, then came forward and glanced briefly at the other corpses. He shook his head. "Menlo ain't here."

"Then there's still a chance!"

"You can keep on hounding him," Vesser said bitterly. "What kind of a man are you, anyway? Sidin' with these red butchers against white men."

"Don't believe that," snapped Logan. "I happened to share a guardhouse with Rain-in-the-Face last fall. He helped me escape. That's all there's between us."

"That's what you say. He wouldn't have helped you escape unless you'd done something for him."

"I didn't mistreat him while he was a prisoner," Logan said. "He appreciated that."

"Will he appreciate it enough to turn us loose?"

"I'll see." Logan turned and walked back to the Sioux chief. "My enemy isn't here," he said. "I would like to go and find him."

"No," said Rain-in-the-Face. "You come with me."

"Where?"

Rain-in-the-Face waved toward the west. "Big powwow . . . five-six days."

"War powwow?"

Rain-in-the-Face nodded. "Sioux no run no more. Fight Custer. Big battle. Many Sioux die, many soldier die. White man break treaty too many time. Great white father lie too many time. Indian not believe treaty no more."

"I'm not a soldier any more," Logan said earnestly. "I make promise—I will not fight Indian. You let us go?"

Rain-in-the-Face shook his head. "No can do. Many Indian in mountain. They kill you."

"I'll take my chances on that."

The chief still shook his head. "Warrior don't like if chief turn white man loose. Say white men tell Indian plan. Rain-in-the-Face chief, but no chief if let white man go."

Rain-in-the-Face was adamant. He would not harm Logan or Vesser, but he would not release them, and toward noon the Indian party began its march away from Otter Creek. There were twenty-five or thirty warriors in the entire party and almost twice the number of women and children.

Before sundown they ran into another Indian party of approximately the same size and the augmented group camped together.

22

They traveled for a week. Logan and Vesser were given horses and were not bound. No apparent watch was kept on them, but Indians were within yards of them day and night. After a week's travel the party, now numbering over two hundred, camped for a few days along a stream, then one morning broke camp and set out for the north and west, traveling leisurely for another four days. They came then to a camp with more than five hundred lodges and this seemed to be the end of the traveling.

"Must be in Montana somewhere," Vesser said to Logan. "The country's brand-new to me. Been through most of Wyoming at one time or another, but this don't look like anything I've ever seen."

"I never heard of a Sioux camp with five hundred lodges," Logan said soberly. "And have you noticed, most of these men are armed with repeating rifles."

"Custer better bring along plenty of men if he wants to fight this bunch," said Vesser.

"There're close to fifteen hundred warriors here now."

There were more the next day. Parties came in from all directions. Lodges went up along the river. Powwows seemed to be going on continually, and Logan and Vesser did not see Rain-in-the-Face for days.

Then one day the Sioux chief came to Logan and Vesser,

as they sat in the doorway of the lodge that had been assigned to them.

"Big talk tonight about you. Crazy Horse and Spotted Tail don't like white man here. Sitting Bull say bad medicine. He want kill all prisoner."

"But we're the only prisoners."

Rain-in-the-Face hesitated. "Spotted Tail got prisoners."

"Here—in this camp?"

The chief nodded. "We catch Custer scouts."

"Custer's really out?"

Rain-in-the-Face pointed to the east. "Two-three days." He pointed to the west. "Soldier one day away." Again he pointed to the north and west. "More soldier."

"It's really war, then!" exclaimed Logan.

"Big war," said the chief solemnly. "Many Sioux die. Kill many soldier."

"Can I see the other prisoners?"

Rain-in-the-Face hesitated. "Prisoners belong Spotted Tail, Crazy Horse."

"I'd like to talk to them."

"No make trouble? Spotted Tail want make prisoner talk. Tell where soldier, how many." He hesitated. "You come." He indicated Vesser. "Friend stay here."

Logan followed the chief through the hostile camp, a hundred yards or more along the stream. Warriors glowered at Logan, squaws screamed and spat at him and dogs snapped at his heels. Finally the chief pointed to a lodge.

The door flap was open and Logan went inside. There were four men inside, one a half-breed Arikara, three white men. They were ragged and dirty and two of them wore bloodied bandages.

"Who're you?" cried one of the men.

"My name's Logan. I'm a prisoner of Rain-in-the-Face."

"Then how come you can walk around the camp?"

"I asked to see you men. I heard you were here."

"And just like that, Rain-in-the-Face brought you over?" sneered one of the prisoners.

"Let's hear what he's got to say," said one of the prisoners.

"He's a renegade, I tell you."

A heavy-set man of about forty-five sprang to his feet. "Shut up! Mister, we're in no position to be choosy. My name's Archibald. I'm a scout for General Crook."

"He's in the field?"

"Ain't you heard? It's a full-scale war. Terry's coming from the north, Custer from the east, Gibbon from the northwest and Crook from Laramie. A week from now there won't be an Indian left on the plains."

"Are the troops aware of how many Indians there are in this camp alone?"

Archibald sobered. "No, they aren't. Of course, there are plenty of scouts out, but most of them have been wiped out by the Injuns. They got me two days ago."

Logan gestured to the other prisoners. "You men all scouts?"

"Not me," spat out one of the men. "I was minin' on Otter Creek, mindin' my own business, when——"

"Otter Creek?" cried Logan. "Your name is Menlo?"

"That's right, Cap Menlo." The man looked sharply at Logan. "You know me?"

"I knew you," Logan said evenly, "twelve years ago . . ."

"Twelve years ago! Why, then I was——"

"At Andersonville. I was one of your prisoners."

"Andersonville!" exclaimed the Army scout. "That was a Reb prison camp."

"Captain Menlo was in charge of the camp."

"That's a lie!" cried Menlo. "I was with Jubal Early all during the war."

"In 'sixty-four," said Logan, "you were in charge of the prison stockade at Andersonville. Under Major Hollister. You sold the rations of the prisoners and starved them——"

Menlo sprang to his feet. "Looky here, I don't know who the hell you are, but I don't take that from nobody."

"Look at me," Logan snapped. "Look at me well. Think about a break in the fall of 'sixty-four. A tunnel that some Union soldiers dug. Do you remember the man in charge of the break? A Union lieutenant——"

Shock seemed to hit the former Confederate. "You ain't . . . ?"

"Yes. Lieutenant Tom Logan."

"Tom Logan," suddenly said the Army scout. "A *Private* Tom Logan's been posted by the Seventh Cavalry. Escaped prisoner."

Logan ignored the scout. He faced Cap Menlo. "You bought out one of our men, gave him extra food so he'd report to you . . ."

"I was only doin' my duty," mumbled Menlo. "The Yanks had plenty of spies in our army."

"But they didn't sell out their own comrades. Nine of our boys were killed in that break. They were murdered because one of our own men sold them out. Do you remember that man, Menlo? Sergeant Dressen——"

"I never heard of no Dressen," whined Menlo.

"Sergeant Dressen of the Michigan Cavalry," Logan

went on. "Now, Captain James Dressen of the Seventh Cavalry——"

"Hey—wait a minute!" cried the Army scout, Archibald. "You mean to stand there and tell me that a damned traitor is one of General Custer's own officers . . . ?"

"This man," Logan said, "turned Dressen loose after he'd betrayed us. Dressen buried his past, after the war became an officer. He's been in the Seventh Cavalry for nine years."

"Be damned." The scout looked accusingly at Menlo. "He tellin' the truth?"

"I don't know nothin' about it. I was with Jubal Early——"

"You just admitted you were at Andersonville."

"Only for a little while. I was wounded and they put me there while I was mendin' . . ."

"What about this man, Dressen?"

"I never heard of him."

"You're a liar," accused the scout. He appealed to the other prisoners. "What do you fellows think?"

The Arikara half-breed shrugged, but the fourth prisoner, a red-eyed, whiskered man of about forty, spat at Menlo. "Rebs and Sioux, they're all the same to me."

Chief Rain-in-the-Face suddenly stuck his head into the tent. "You . . . !" he cried, stabbing his forefinger at Logan.

Logan, startled, stepped forward. Behind Rain-in-the-Face came a small procession of Indians, two men wearing the feathers of chiefs and a tall, well-built Indian in the ceremonial regalia of a medicine man.

The first of the chiefs looked at Logan and spoke to Rain-in-the-Face in Sioux. The latter replied explosively, then turned to Logan.

"Chief Spotted Tail. He say prisoner must die."

The medicine man began to scream in a singsong wail. Rain-in-the-Face listened impassively for a moment, then shook his head. "Sitting Bull say no kill prisoner, lose big battle."

"What do *you* say, Chief?" Logan asked. "You're a chief too. Or are they bigger chiefs than you?"

"No!" cried Rain-in-the-Face. "Rain-in-the-Face big chief, bring plenty warriors. You *my* prisoner." He whirled on the Sioux and shouted angrily at them in their own tongue. The others responded with as much vehemence, and one of the chiefs suddenly sprang forward and struck Logan in the face with his open hand. Rain-in-the-Face shoved him aside, and for a moment it appeared that the two Sioux chiefs would fight each other. But Sitting Bull interceded in his singsongy wail, and after a few minutes the other chiefs stalked off.

"You come," Rain-in-the-Face said to Logan. "You my prisoner. They no kill."

"I'm not through here," Logan said. "This is the man I've been looking for, the man who can help me against Captain Dressen."

"You come now," the Sioux insisted. "Better, or you die maybe."

Cap Menlo pounced on that. "I told you he was a renegade!"

Angrily, Logan turned away and followed Rain-in-the-Face back to the lodge he had occupied with Dan Vesser. Rain-in-the-Face left him there.

"One of the prisoners is Menlo," Logan told Vesser.

"So they couldn't kill him after all."

Logan shook his head. "We may all be dead before tomorrow. They wanted to kill us now. Rain-in-the-Face fought them down. At least as far as you and I are concerned. It looks bad for the others."

"Nothin' we can do to help them."

"One of the prisoners is a scout for General Crook. The armies are closing in from all sides. There's going to be a big battle."

A wild clatter and commotion suddenly went up in the Indian village. Warriors, squaws, children and dogs rushed to the south. Guns started banging and kept on for five minutes, when the movement began back into the village.

Logan, peering out of the tent, suddenly let out a groan. "More Sioux! A really big war party."

"Where are they all coming from?"

"I don't know. The Cheyennes are allies of the Sioux. It looks like they've sent out a general call for help, and they're coming in from all over."

Logan's guess was true, for more Indians came into the village before nightfall. The village swelled. Lodges were erected, but the Indians also began doubling up. Where the average for a lodge was usually two warriors, there were now three, four and even five per lodge. In addition to the squaws and the children.

The big powwow started at sundown and went on for hours. It must have been close to midnight when the powwow exploded into a general whooping and howling and a rush toward the western end of the village.

Logan and Vesser, who were wide awake, looked out of their lodge.

"Another war party," said Logan. "And this one's been in a battle. There are wounded with them. And look—uniforms."

"Custer's men?"

"I don't believe so. This party's from the west. They probably fought Crook."

"And got themselves licked."

Logan hesitated. "There's no wailing or mourning for the dead. That howling is their version of cheering. No, I think they won a battle."

"Against Crook's army?"

"It's hard to believe, but that's a pretty big war party. Must be two to three thousand warriors."

The powwow was resumed, and it was close to dawn before it finally died down. Logan caught a fitful hour or two of sleep. It was daylight when he opened his eyes and saw Dan Vesser sitting just inside the door, his chin on his drawn-up knees.

"They didn't feed us last night," Vesser said suddenly.

"Too much excitement. I guess they forgot."

"You ask me, they didn't think it was worth while. I got a feelin' this is our last morning."

Logan was not inclined to argue the point. The population of the Indian village had doubled since the day before. Each new party carried with it its own chiefs. The last arrivals had whetted their anger with blood only the day before. Rain-in-the-Face could not hold out against them.

The usual activity began in the village, considerably augmented because of the increased population. But no one brought food to Logan and Vesser. A new war party arrived and a big powwow began. More Indians came during the morning; several large parties left.

23

Midafternoon.

The interminable powwow was going on in the center of the camp, but it was, if anything, more subdued than those during the previous day and night.

Then, suddenly, above the din of the village there came a bugle call!

Only a few notes, faint. Then, in the sudden stillness that fell upon the village, the bugle sounded, loud and clear.

Then it was drowned out in the sudden commotion that exploded in the Indian village along the Little Big Horn. Every man, woman and child screamed and rushed toward the east, the direction from which the bugle call had come.

Women and children were knocked aside in the mad rush, dogs were stepped upon, tents and lodges were knocked askew, some even flattened.

There was a sudden emptiness in Logan's stomach. He lay sprawled on the ground inside his lodge, staring out through the door. Vesser lay beside him. It was useless to talk, for the noise in the village was deafening.

Then guns began to go off in the east, and yelling and screaming came from a distance. Logan got to his knees. He stuck his head out of the tent.

"The village is empty!" he cried. He sprang to his feet, stepped out of the tent. Vesser scurried after him and looked around.

"This is our chance!" he cried. "Let's run for it."

In the east the gunfire began a rolling of thunder. The pounding of hundreds, thousands of horses, shook the earth. But in the village there was a comparative, vast silence.

Vesser darted between two lodges, heading for the creek. Logan started to follow, then whirled and ran down the line of lodges.

Archibald, the cavalry scout, was peering out of a lodge as Logan came running.

"The village is empty," he cried, as he pounded up. "This is our chance to escape."

The prisoners poured out of the lodge. "We haven't got guns," said Archibald.

"We won't have lives when they return," Logan retorted. "Come on."

"I ain't goin' with no renegade," protested Menlo.

"Then stay here!" cried Archibald. He took off for the stream. The others followed. Logan waited, saw Menlo take off and went after him.

Upstream, Vesser was already crossing the water. He saw Logan and the others, yelled and gestured. There was a pony herd beyond Vesser, several hundred horses, ringed by ropes tied to trees.

The prisoners headed for the herd.

They splashed through the shallow creek, climbed up on the bank beyond and ran pell-mell for the horses. The animals were half wild and milled furiously in their enclosure, but the men were desperate. They rushed in among the horses, caught at a head or bridle. There was no unity of action; it was every man for himself.

Yet all were mounted in moments. The herd broke the ropes that held it together, and the escaping prisoners mingled with the dispersing horses.

Logan, astride a wiry pony, saw Vesser bobbing along on

a horse. He searched, caught sight of Menlo galloping off to the south and kneed his horse so it would follow in that direction.

The dispersing Indian herd was galloping in all directions, but suddenly Logan noted that the pressure of horses around him was lessening. The animals were veering northward. Logan saw the reason—a solid mass of mounted Indians coming from the west and south. He groaned. If he continued straight ahead, he would run head-on into the Indians. Yet if he veered, he would be forced against the stream, be compelled to cross and be swept into the battle that was going on east of the Indian village.

He swerved to the left, kicked his mount's rump and bent low, riding as swiftly as he could. The Indians, however, had seen the isolated riders among the horse herd. The solid mass of Indians began to spread out as riders galloped ahead of the main body to intercept the escaping riders.

Ahead, along the creek, was a heavy patch of woods. Beyond it was higher, rougher ground, also heavily wooded.

If Logan could gain the woods ahead of the Indians, there might be a chance for him.

He gave the ride all he had. Bullets began to whine about him, but the range was still long. The trees came closer, but so did the Indians. The riderless horses had faded away. Ahead of Logan were only two riders. Logan could not determine who they were, but he was rapidly overtaking them.

Logan's horse stumbled, almost throwing him, but recovered and went on. A rifle bullet tugged at Logan's coat sleeve; he heard another smack into the body of his horse and felt the animal give a last spasmodic leap. Then it plunged to the ground. Logan, warned, leaped clear. He hit the earth heavily, turned a complete somersault and came up running.

Hoofs pounded behind him.

Fire seared his left thigh. Logan made a last desperate lunge and leaped headlong into a clump of sumac at the edge of the forest. The Indian who was on his heels missed him, continued on into the woods.

Logan came out of the sumac, plunged forward to get deeper into the thicket. Then, for an instant, panic seized him. There was gunfire ahead of him—heavy, rolling gunfire.

A battle was being fought somewhere in the woods. The Indians coming up from the rear were reinforcements for a large force already engaged in the woods, a completely different battle from the big one being fought east of the Indian village on the north side of the Little Big Horn.

A man appeared in front of Logan. It was Dan Vesser, the miner, running on foot.

"Vesser!" yelled Logan at the top of his lungs.

The miner, running, looked over his shoulder. He slackened his pace for Logan to catch up.

"Don't it beat all! There's Injuns ahead of us, Injuns behind us and Injuns over there. . . ." Vesser panted as Logan ran beside him.

The brush behind them rattled. Twigs and branches cracked. A gun cracked and a bullet cut a branch in front of Logan's eyes. He plunged to the ground in a clump of brush. A body landed beside him. Vesser.

The two men hugged the ground. Horses rushed past them, bullets whined and whacked into trees. A horse fell, struggled to its feet, and an unmounted Indian almost stepped on Dan Vesser. The Indians were no longer searching for individual whites. A battle was raging, and they were moving to join it.

Logan and Vesser lay concealed in the brush for ten minutes. The battle seemed to be withdrawing to the east, the soldiers apparently retreating and the Indians pursuing them.

Logan got to his knees and peered through the brush. "It's clear ahead of us." Then he exclaimed and plunged out of the brush. An Indian lay a dozen feet away. Clutched in his dead hand was a Winchester rifle. A bandolier of cartridges was about his shoulder. Logan tore the gun from the Sioux's hand, raised him so that the bandolier could be slipped free.

Vesser joined him. "Which way?"

"Any direction's bad," Logan replied, "but the fighting's up there."

"Then we go back!"

Logan shook his head. "I go on."

"What for? You been tellin' that savage chief for days you wouldn't fight the Indians and now you——"

"Dressen's up there somewhere," Logan said doggedly. "He's with the Seventh Cavalry."

"By tonight there won't be no Seventh Cavalry," retorted Vesser. He looked furtively around. "Well, I ain't gonna wander around here by myself."

"Come on, then!"

They moved cautiously ahead. The noise of the battle became louder. They came upon a dead horse, in a few minutes a dead Indian. He had carried only a bow and arrows, but in a few minutes they found another Indian, a Sioux, still alive but barely conscious. A rifle lay by his side. Vesser quickly appropriated it.

Then, suddenly, they reached the creek. There was heavy

fighting only two or three hundred yards to the right, and Logan caught a glimpse of soldiers on the far side of the stream. They were struggling to climb an almost sheer bluff and were having hard going. Even as he looked, a man fell and, hitting projections twice, tumbled into the water from which he did not emerge.

Bent low, Logan entered the water. He stopped and looked back. Vesser stood on the creek bank, scowling. Then he plunged into the water and followed.

They were halfway across the stream when a bullet suddenly splashed water into Logan's eyes. He swiveled to the left, saw two Indians wading toward them. He thrust out his rifle, fired. One of the Indians dropped into the water. The second turned and fled. Vesser fired a quick shot after him, missed. Logan fired again, and the Indian plunged into the water. But his head emerged a few yards downstream and Logan fired again. Whether he scored a hit or not, he did not know. It was more urgent for him to reach the shore.

He plunged through the water, found a sandbar and waded in ankle-deep water. He reached the shore, waited for Vesser to come up with him, then struck into the heavy underbrush, following the shore line.

They walked for three or four minutes, then Vesser suddenly exclaimed, "There's the river again. How'd that happen?"

Logan groaned. "This is an island we're on." He peered ahead. There were no more soldiers in sight on the bluff, but at the foot of it, working their way upward were a hundred or more Indians. Still others were working their way downstream.

A voice suddenly yelled at Logan, "You, there!"

Logan whirled to the left, his rifle at the ready. A man rose from a depression in the ground. A man wearing a uniform. Logan rushed forward.

The man wore a sergeant's chevrons. "Get down here," he ordered, indicating the depression.

Logan dropped down beside the man and then Vesser came tumbling in after him. Logan looked quickly at the insignia on the sergeant. "Troop F," he said.

"That's right," the man said. "My horse got shot out from under me."

"Who's your commanding officer?"

"Major Reno. Custer sent us off this morning, while he went north——"

"Then he's the one who's fighting north of the river."

The man winced. "Another battle? How many damned Sioux are there in this section? We run into a thousand or

more right here. They gave us hell. He suddenly pointed to the left. "I almost forgot. There're three-four of our boys down there a ways. I was just about to try to get them when you popped up."

"Let's find them," Logan suggested. "We're on an island, but we're exposed. The more of us there are together . . ."

"That's what I was thinkin'."

The three men climbed out of the depression and bent low, ran downstream. A gun banged ahead and a bullet kicked up dirt in front of Logan.

"Hold it!" he roared.

A white man appeared from behind a cottonwood. "Sorry," he called out.

The three men rushed forward, discovered a lieutenant of the Seventh Cavalry, a half-breed scout and—Cap Menlo!

"You still alive?" groaned Menlo. He stabbed at the lieutenant. "This is the man I was telling you about, the renegade. . . ."

"Logan," said the lieutenant suddenly, "you're Logan of Dressen's troop. I saw you in the guardhouse." He added grimly, "I was O.D. when you escaped." He held out his hand. "Give me that rifle; you're under arrest."

"Don't be a fool," snapped Logan. "This is no time for that."

The lieutenant hesitated. "Guess you're right. The chances are against any of us being alive in an hour."

"Down!" cried the sergeant.

A fusillade of bullets whipped around the small force as they all plummeted to the ground. Peering out over a log, Logan saw a dozen Sioux come out of the north branch of the river. He thrust out his Winchester, began blazing away.

The other whites also poured out a heavy fire, and the Indians gave way, retreating into the water.

"I got one!" cried Vesser.

"So did I," retorted the sergeant. He levered a fresh cartridge into the chamber of his rifle, fired again. "And there's another."

The Indians were suddenly gone, some swimming, some diving under water, some floating away, dead.

The lieutenant rolled over on his back and regarded Logan, who was kneeling a few feet away. "They tell me you're quite a lad," he observed. "I don't believe half I hear, but was it really Jesse James who held up that train and took you from Sergeant Shuba?"

"That's water under the bridge," said Logan. "Shuba was going to kill me."

"That, I believe," the lieutenant said. "I saw him when he came back."

"He's alive?"

"Oh, sure. He's out there somewhere, I suppose. He was in the hospital for a couple of months and then he spent a couple of months more under observation in the mental ward, but he went back to Dressen's troop just before we left the Fort."

"Your friend," Logan said to Menlo. "Captain Dressen."

"I don't know anyone named Dressen," snarled Menlo. "And I've had just about enough from you." He appealed to the lieutenant. "This man's a Injun sympathizer. Him and that chief over there was reg'lar pals."

"Rain-in-the-Face," Logan said. "You remember him?"

The lieutenant grimaced. "Didn't I catch hell for that? The day before his trial and he breaks out." He stabbed at Logan. "You helped him!"

"It was the other way around. He helped me."

"Why would he do that?"

"Some of the prisoners had been picking on him, and I stuck up for him."

"That's true then? In the investigation a couple of the prisoners told about that, but I figured it was so much hogwash, the boys hoping to cut their own time short."

"Rain-in-the-Face had outside help. Sioux. But I left them a half mile from the Fort. I didn't see him again until a few weeks ago when he took Vesser and me prisoners."

"I don't believe a word of it," snarled Menlo.

"Now, wa-ait a minute," cried Vesser. "That I know about, Cap. I was with him, and I guess if it hadn't been for him being with me at the time I wouldn't be wearin' my hair today. Which reminds me, I been wantin' to ask you, Menlo, how come the boys at Otter Creek all got killed, but you got away?"

"I escaped!"

"I'll bet. You probably run at the first sniff of an Indian."

"Side with him, Vesser," gritted Menlo. "You was always an Injun lover yourself."

The lieutenant whipped up his hand. "Hold it, men!"

He was peering toward the river. An Indian appeared, then another and suddenly a swarm of them, moving downstream, rifles and bows held high to keep them out of the water.

"Quiet!" whispered the lieutenant.

But it was no use. One of the Indian leaders yelled and gesticulated toward the island. The Indians began to move toward it.

"Hold your fire," the lieutenant ordered in a low tone.

The Indians reached the edge of the water. Suddenly Menlo rose up, yelled, "I ain't stayin' here—" He started to rush away—and a volley from the Indians cut him down.

The other whites opened fire, then. The Indians charged out of the water, rushed upon the small group, but backed off when the rapid fire of the repeating rifles cut into them. For a few moments there was a wild scrambling and thrashing about, as individual Indians charged forward, emptied their guns at the whites and fell in their turn.

Then, as suddenly as the engagement had started, it ended. The sergeant was dead, the half-breed scout was badly wounded, and Vesser had a bullet in his thigh. Menlo . . . Menlo was crawling toward Logan, blood streaming from his mouth, a bullet through his stomach and another in his chest.

Logan moved out, dragged the man forward.

"Damn you," mouthed the dying man, "get you . . . for this . . . !"

"You're dying, man," exclaimed the lieutenant.

"No!" cried Menlo. "C-can't die. Got to . . ." His head rolled sideward and his breath whistled through his lips.

Logan knelt beside him. "You haven't got five minutes, Menlo," he said.

Menlo's mouth twisted in agony. "I . . . I don't wanna die. I . . ." He stopped and his eyes bulged from his face. "You, Logan . . . tell me . . . truth . . ."

Logan nodded. "You're going."

A small geyser of blood spurted from the dying man's mouth. Logan thought that the man was gone, but he held on. "Dressen . . . what you said 'bout him . . . true . . . he . . . he sold you out."

"I know," Logan said. "I've searched for you for months. I—I wanted you to write out a confession, but now"—he stopped as Menlo's eyes glazed—"now, it's too late."

"I heard him," said the lieutenant. "He said Dressen sold you out. I don't know what that means, but I heard it."

"I heard him, too," Vesser said. "This Menlo—he was a Confederate soldier during the war. Logan's told me enough of his story so I know what it means that Menlo tried to say, now . . ."

"Forget it," said Logan wearily. "We'll all be dead men soon."

"No, we won't," snapped the lieutenant. "Look, the river's clear. I think we can cross and climb that bluff."

"I can't climb," said Vesser.

"We'll carry you!"

Logan knew that their position on the little island was

known. The Indians had gone for the moment, but they would be back, undoubtedly in larger numbers. Advancing across the river was a hazardous task, but it was certainly no more dangerous than staying on the island. He got up, stooped and caught up Vesser.

The lieutenant grabbed Logan's rifle, as well as Vesser's and his own. He plunged through the underbrush into the water. Logan followed heavily.

Halfway across the stream, bullets began to search for them, but the Indians who were firing them, wherever they were, were at some distance, and the three men reached the far shore. Then bullets began to come closr.

"Put me down," gasped Vesser. "You can make it without me."

Logan lowered Vesser to the ground, and a bullet kicked dirt into his face. He swore and caught up Vesser again. "Let's go!"

The lieutenant caught hold of Vesser, suddenly exclaimed and tossed away the three rifles he was carrying.

Unencumbered with guns, Logan and the lieutenant half carried, half dragged the wounded Vesser up the steep bluff. Bullets hit the dirt around them, and once Vesser winced as he was again hit.

Halfway up, Logan heard a shout. A blue-uniformed soldier was slipping and sliding down the bluff toward them. "Hang on!" the man cried.

Another soldier came sliding down. Logan and the lieutenant stopped. In a moment the soldiers joined them and caught hold of the badly wounded Vesser. Logan and the lieutenant went up ahead.

On top of the bluff was what was left of four troops of cavalry. Major Reno, Captain Benteen and Captain Dressen came running toward Logan and the lieutenant.

Dressen grabbed the lieutenant's arm. "DeRudio!" he cried. "We'd given you up . . ." Then he looked into the grimy, smeared face of Logan, and he reeled as if a bullet had suddenly struck him.

"Logan! Tom Logan. . . ."

Major Reno looked sharply at Logan. "The deserter?"

"You're under arrest!" screamed Dressen.

"Wait a minute," cried the lieutenant, DeRudio. "I know something about this——"

"You don't know anything," babbled Dressen. "This man's caused me more trouble than any man in the entire Seventh Cavalry. He's a thief and an outlaw—a murderer." He suddenly whipped out his revolver. "He's tried to kill me . . ."

Major Reno thrust out a hand and knocked down Dres-

sen's revolver. "Don't be a fool, Captain. He isn't going anywhere right now. This matter can be taken care of if and when we get out of here. Right now, we've got a thousand Indians surrounding us. We need every gun."

"Don't believe him," babbled Dressen, "don't believe a word he tells you. It's lies—lies!"

"Is it, Captain?" DeRùdio persisted. He pointed toward the river. "A man was killed down there, a man named Menlo—a former Confederate."

"No!" howled Dressen. "Oh, no!"

"He talked before he died. He said . . ."

But Dressen no longer listened. He was running toward the edge of the bluff, and before anyone could stop him he was plunging down recklessly, heedlessly.

Logan and the officers followed to the edge of the precipice. Dressen was halfway down. And then a bullet from across the river hit him and he pitched out into space. His body hit the water sixty feet below.

It did not rise to the surface.

A mighty blow caught Logan between the shoulder blades and a thick voice cried out, "Dom. Dom Logan!"

Logan whirled. The dirty face of Von Brandenburg was beaming at him. "You've come back!"

"Baron," said Logan fervently.

"I heard," the baron said, suddenly sober. "So our Captain Dressen is gone." He shrugged.

"McCloskey?" Logan asked.

The baron winced. "A good soldier . . . he was."

"Shuba?"

Von Brandenburg shrugged. "He never came back to our troop. Captain Dressen didn't want him. He had him transferred. He's in Troop H."

"Where's Troop H?"

"With the general. He broke us up this morning, sent half over this way. The general keep rest of troops, march north."

Logan shook his head. He knew that Custer's detachment had met the main body of the Sioux, just east of the giant village on the Little Big Horn.

It was over. Major Reno lost almost half of his men in the retreat across the Little Big Horn and the stand he made for almost thirty hours, following.

There were recriminations and investigations. But Reno was alive, so were half of his men. Custer was dead . . . and every man who had followed him into the battle of the Little Big Horn.

Weeks later, at Fort Abraham Lincoln, an officer came to

Trooper Logan in the guardhouse. He wore brand-new shoulder straps, and he was the new captain of Troop C.

"You're free, Logan," he said. "There'll be no court-martial. Lieutenant DeRudio's testimony, the story of that man, Vesser, and—well, a statement made by the widow of Captain Dressen."

He stopped. "I won't say any more. Only—well, go on outside."

Outside the guardhouse, Alice Wilder waited for Logan.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

FRANK GRUBER started his career as a trade journal editor in the Midwest. Despite his success as one of the most prolific western writers in the world, Mr. Gruber has always had a desire to follow a more journalistic career. He is the author of at least 50 books, more than 54 motion pictures, at least 350 magazine stories and dozens of television scripts. He created numerous western television serials, notably *Wells Fargo*. Mr. Gruber is also known as a mystery writer. He presently lives in Los Angeles, California.

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